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LITTLEDALE.



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LITTLEDALE.

BY SEJANUS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1878.

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LITTLEDALE.

CHAPTER I.

SILAS Pod was domiciled at the vicarage. He had a very anxious look about the eyes; his hair had apparently grown more grey, "but not with years." He felt he was one too many, so he often told himself, but it was not his fault. He looked back over his own life, so lonely and drear. He had seen Clara, and although he had so confidently stated his intention to break off the matter, he thought differently now. Her beauty and refined appearance had effected what no arguments could have done. So in the morning he stopped the vicar, as he was rising after breakfast, and said—

“I want to speak to you.”

“Certainly, Mr. Pod.”

“When I knew the Rev. Cyrus Clark at the Cedars, a more happy and contented creature did not exist. I often envied him his calm, happy spirit. But when I made that gentleman’s acquaintance at his own house, he was quite different.”

“Was he, indeed?” said Cyrus, with a faint smile.

“Yes. I have found out the complaint he labours under. It is this: he invited a person to stay with him named Silas Pod, whose presence hung over him like a pall. But there is hope; he need not despair; the incubus will be gone very shortly—in fact, in forty-five minutes.”

“What do you mean?” asked Cyrus, really put out.

“Just this: I feel myself a constraint on you. Don’t say no, because it is very wrong for a clergyman to say what is not true to a person who desires to be his friend.”

“What are you driving at?”

“That if you like to ask my advice, I will

advise you to the best of my power. Bless you, I have been father confessor to nearly two generations, so you need not fear I shall split."

"I have no idea what you mean. If you tell me, I will answer you truly."

"Very well. I see you are unhappy, not seeing your way. You are attached to a girl. I believe her to be modest, and I know her to be good looking; and you can't make up your mind about it. You persuade yourself it is timidity; it is really pride, because you are afraid of the smell of leather. Now, pride is a very good thing sometimes; sometimes very evil."

Cyrus flushed scarlet, but was silent. Silas carefully closed the door to secure them from interruption, and continued—

"The lady's papa drank. Well, she couldn't help that; I don't think she does. Her guardian is not a gentleman; he can't help that. Her brothers are too fond of money to acquire the polish of gentlemen. Many gentlemen spend too much, and you don't propose to marry her brothers."

Cyrus broke in—

“By what right do you turn my affairs to jest in this way?”

“The right of a friend. But let me finish; I shall not be long. The young lady is uneducated. Granted. In the usual course of events, you could give her quite sufficient hints to supply the deficiency. I don’t exactly know your income, but expect it’s quite enough; besides, she will not expect much.”

“Why do you speak in this way, recommending and not recommending?”

“I will tell you a short story, if you will be so obliging as to look out of the window until I have done.”

Cyrus looked as directed.

“Many years ago a young clerk was articled to a lawyer. He had great ideas of getting on; he was not stupid, and most people liked him. One day an old man, who looked very beery, and was very whining in his speech, called. His son was unjustly accused of the trifling offence of shooting a keeper in a poaching affray—a very common occurrence where the preserves are overstocked. The lawyer not caring to take the matter up in his

office, turned it over to the young man I was speaking about. He thought it a stepping-stone to fame, and took it up eagerly.

"In consequence, he had to call at the ancient peasant's house a great many times. He went at first for business, and afterwards for pleasure. The peasant had a niece ; she was not bad looking, and very clever. The articled clerk saw and loved her, but her surroundings were not to his taste. He found that a hundred pounds would ship her respected uncle and cousin to Australia, but on mature consideration he decided not to spend the money or marry the girl. She was self-willed, and resented his desertion, quite comprehending the facts of the case. Women are often very clever in seeing the motives of men. But he had lingered too long ; the fibres of his heart wound round the object of his affection. He strove to forget her, but could not. She threw aside her maidenly reserve and wept at his feet, imploring his affection, but money gained the day.

"Well, the hopeful poacher got off. No prosecutor appeared. The money was supplied by some one else, and they departed to seek their fortunes

in another hemisphere. The girl went with them, so some people said; others not.

“A lapse of four years is supposed to take place. The young man went to London to pass his examinations. He got through, but was in no hurry to get a practice. As he had private means, he mingled in the pleasures of the metropolis, both bad and good, but attended the law courts regularly, as he met a good many of his friends engaged for or against the cases as they were called on. After the courts were over, they usually adjourned to a tavern to dinner. One day he and another were passing down Fleet Street, and were accosted by a very well-dressed person, to whom he was introduced as a Mr. Irons. An invitation to both to dine followed for the next day. As they went on their way, his friend said—

“‘Do you know Mrs. Irons?’

“‘No, I don’t.’

“‘Well, then, mind your pockets. She has cleaned more people out than I can count.’

“‘How do you mean?’

“‘Irons is bad enough, but she is worse. There is no man but she supplies a bait at her

house for his taste; but it always ends in his means being embarked in a bubble company or something in the moon.'

"How do you mean?"

"I can hardly tell, except that open immorality is the only thing not practised there. Young Bartholomew, the great grazier's son, went there. He was a serious youth, so a series of semi-religious concerts was organized. Young Flareup was drawn into writing compromising notes. He was going to be married, so to get clear he invested his fortune in a loan to the Zulu Kaffirs, and received back his notes from Mr. Irons."

"Good heavens! But does anybody go there?"

"Oh yes. Every one thinks himself safe till he is caught."

"But how about yourself?"

"Oh, I got Irons off in a case he was mixed up in, and I made him promise to hold me ineligible for shares of all sorts for ever. He keeps his word; but otherwise they are a nice pair."

"The young lawyer went and found a splendid

house and a magnificent dinner. When he was introduced, memory seemed to stir at sight of the hostess; he had seen her somewhere, he couldn't tell where exactly. She half resembled his lost love, and yet was different in manner and speech.

"After dessert, they adjourned to coffee in the drawing-room. The hostess was charming. Two or three friends dropped in. At the end of the drawing-room was a conservatory. He went to look at the flowers, but heard a footstep behind him, and hid behind a shrub, as there were plenty in the place. He heard a voice he well remembered say in harshest tones—

"'Come out; I wish to speak to you.'

"Abashed, he stepped out and saw his hostess with lowering brows and quivering lips. She addressed him once more, and to the point.

"'Don't you know me? You ought to. I am the girl who, seeing you so wedded to your money, has thought it no shame to sell her soul for it. I might have been different once, but that's past. Look in my drawing-room, and see the dupes that are being drawn into the net of ruin.'

"He was startled out of his usual composure,

and tried to utter a few words of explanation. She continued—

“ ‘I suppose you think because you left me I ought to have pined and died. People don’t in real life. Go your ways, but not in peace. I know your character. Over the rest of your life will be written, “It might have been.” You find me rich and courted by all who come near me, so you see I should not have been such a very bad match after all. My husband was penniless when I married him. He is the hand, I the brain, that directs all our concerns and speculations. Think of it when you are in quiet, when you wake in the darkness of the night, that it was your pride or avarice that has launched on the world a woman unrestrained by either justice or mercy, whose only prayer has been that you may never have a wife to love you ; or if you do, she may hate and despise you, as I have done in the depths of a wasted life. Behold a woman more hopelessly fallen than any lost creature in the streets of this great Babylon. Go, and never cross my path again, if you value aught save gold.’ ”

Silas paused and said—

"I don't know if it's quite the orthodox ending. Mr. and Mrs. Irons lived long after, and died, for aught I know, happy and respected in the world's eyes. But I do know that the affections once dried up in a man or woman, there is no further hope of happiness. If you are really attached to Clara Maunder, go and ask her to share your life. If she likes some one else, very likely you'll get over it. In that case, your pride will be your consolation. Don't let it all rest on money or connections; they are a very small piece of life, except to people that have a large amount of vanity. If you don't see your way in money matters, perhaps I can help you."

Cyrus turned round and saw the face of Silas was in a quiver of excitement. Gradually he cooled, and said—

"I'm an old fool, I know, but I see you're going to make of your life a sour, discontented lot like mine. Decide at once one way or the other."

"I will go at once to her, Silas. I was only——"

"Afraid of the old lawyer laughing. Very

likely I shall. But the moral of my story is equally good. Don't wait too long. Remember, to have a case decided against you at once is better than a delay of years for a successful hearing."

Silas got up and opened the door. A servant removed the breakfast things, and Cyrus went to array himself for conquest. A knock came at the front door ; Jonathan Harker had called to see Mr. Pod. The library was clear for the visitor, and Silas and Harker sat down opposite one another.

"I can tell you all. But there is a little difficulty in the way ; they will have to be bought of a very knowing card."

The face of Silas expanded with delight ; it was quite radiant with joy. Cyrus, unluckily for himself, looked in ; he was about to withdraw, when Silas nodded to him in a satisfied manner. Cyrus deemed it a happy omen for the success of his suit. The colour of the threads, whether of dark or bright hue, that are woven in man's history can only be accurately determined when the shuttle of time has finished the pattern. The bright ray of hope may tint the dark thread light, or the cloud of needless

fear make the bright thread of success as dark as that of grief.

Cyrus turned into the town, and walked to Matthew's shop. He called and found both brothers out. James was gone to a village at a little distance, and Robert was a door or two off, fitting. Matthew sat in the shop, but he rose on Cyrus's entrance.

"Sit down, Matthew."

"Very well, sir; I am [not yet quite got over my attack."

"All the young people left you alone to-day?"

"Yes, sir. James and Robert are out, and Clara is gone to take a little chicken-broth to Sarah Sloper."

Now, Cyrus knew Sarah Sloper lived at a cottage half a mile up the lane that led to Upper Cheeney Farm, so, having wished Matthew good day as soon as he decently could, bent his steps in the direction of Sarah Sloper's cottage. "Everything goes well," he said aloud, as soon as he was alone. He strode along buoyed up by hope and fancies of the most roseate hue. Sarah's house was soon in sight, and Clara came out of it at

the same moment. When she saw him, she stopped and looked as if she would go back ; but she had inherited, among other things, courage. James Maunder might have been a weak, but he was not a cowardly man. So she walked on down the lane with beating heart. As he approached the thought came into her mind : What if, after all, he could explain his absence ? He was not bad looking, and his hope shone through his honest eyes, giving them and his face generally a look of bright animation which heightened his natural advantages.

“ Good morning, Miss Maunder.”

“ It used to be ‘ Clara.’ ”

“ Yes ; but you are in a different position now, living with your brothers and guardian.”

He could not have opened the ball better by the most refined art. Unconsciously he took a leaf of very early date in human experience : “ Ye shall be as gods.”

“ I called at your sh—house, and found Matthew better. I think I have good news for you. What do you think it is ? ”

“ Can’t tell,” said Clara, getting very hot and

angry. With a woman's intuition, she felt what he was come to say, and resented its being put as good news.

"Our friend, Mr. Silas Pod, is on the eve of important discoveries. He is such a clever man."

He spoke with warmth, for he recollects Pod's service of the morning to himself.

"What discoveries do you allude to, Mr. Clark?"

"That the lost papers are discovered, and that Matthew will be exonerated from all blame in consequence."

Here he got confused, and tried to continue his speech, but his emotions were almost too much for him. He at length stammered out in a hurried manner—

"Oh, Clara, now we are so fortunate, can you look at me with favour? I ask you to share my life. With you for my guardian angel I should feel life a better and happier lot. Will you be my wife?" and he abruptly stopped.

Clara flushed scarlet with indignation; his somewhat confused way of speaking tallied exactly with Jones's evil suggestions.

"Do you think that I can be so blind?"

But he misinterpreted her; he imagined she was depreciating herself.

"No, no. I know what you would say, but I am quite content to take you for better and worse. I do not feel any difference of station now."

"Of course he doesn't," thought Clara, "now he has no doubt read and comprehended what I am worth in money value; otherwise, I should have been cast away and forgotten."

"I do not feel the difference, sir, you so kindly allude to. The daughter of Mr. Maunder, of the Grange, is quite capable of understanding many things. You went away without a word, without a sign; you returned with a lawyer, who no doubt told you many things. I am an ignorant girl, but I know and feel one thing—that as long as the papers were lost you never came near me; now they are found, you press your hateful suit. Go back to your friend, and tell him I am quite aware of the cause of your conduct."

She stopped, worn out by her own vehemence, and paused for breath. Cyrus's face got very white and angry; the accusation so skilfully pre-

ferred struck him dumb. He certainly did not look as innocent as he was, but in despair he continued—

“Clara, hear me for your own sake, for my sake. There is some dreadfully wicked person deceiving you in the matter.”

“There is, and he is before me. Go! I despise you!” As, pointing with her hand, she stood panting with passion and drawn to her full height, she had never looked more beautiful.

“I will go,” he said proudly, but with a certain pathos in his voice.

“Go, then, and behold yourself in true colours.”

But he did not. He tried one last throw, like a desperate gamester.

“By my hopes of heaven, the time will come when you will find that the evil lie you accuse me of shall recoil on the head of him who has deceived you.”

“Go, I tell you! Priests always think they can deceive and cozen women, but sometimes the women find it out in time.”

She was excited and said more than she intended, but, like a true woman, would not retract.

He sadly turned away, and went down the lane, jumped over the first stile, and was gone.

Clara began to walk fast and then almost to run. She dashed into the shop, through the parlour, and up to her bedroom, where she threw herself on the bed in a passion of tears, which relieved her excited heart. Did she repent? No. She believed all that Maurice had told her, and more than all. Had he not come back when the papers were found? Could she ever forget the day at the vicarage, when he was at her feet searching for the picture? And then he had been so base. She despised him.

In a little time she got up, bathed her face and straightened her hair, and went about her usual household tasks. The leaf of the book of her life inscribed with the names of Clara Mauder and Cyrus Clark she had turned over for ever. She may look back to it in after years “as a tale that is told;” she may look back in her mind’s eye, as we look at a dried botanical specimen; but we know it can never grow again, and she knew in her heart that one great epoch of her life was over. In her pride of fancied knowledge, she thought a

morning mist was dispersed by the beams of the sun of knowledge; but, nevertheless, there were many beautiful dewdrops on the grass and flowers gone too. She felt something gone, even while she believed him guilty.

When Cyrus left the vicarage, Pod was rubbing his hands, Harker having delivered the news that it was all right, but the papers would have to be bought of "a very knowing card."

"Tell us all you can, Harker, and quickly. Time may be precious. I lost them last Saturday by a slow pair of horses."

"Well, you see, sir, I thought as Mr. Edward St. John hadn't got them. It wasn't the style for a gentleman to do it in, and I thought as young Jones could tell something. So we went down to the Feathers. I got him to talk, and, Lor', if he didn't let out that the papers was about the Chiveydale property. That were enough; I knew who had them tight as wax."

"Well, but don't you suppose he has given them to his master?"

"He ain't such a fool. He is going to get his price, don't you fear."

"Well, I suppose he'll want twenty pounds."

"Yes, he will, and a great deal more than that."

"Deuce he will! What do you think?"

"I'll ask. It's better than making an offer. You can knock a price down, while you have to advance on an offer very often."

"Is there anything else?"

"Yes, there is a good deal else. Jack Harrison is put on by the St. Johns to search for them. I put him off, but maybe he'll come back. Jack knows what's o'clock generally, but, you see, Mr. St. John has not told him all, and so he can't work right."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause I let him think Mr. Edward had them all the time, and he's gone back to Stratton Manor to see."

"Famous! And left the field clear for us."

"For a little time, so you had better think over what the papers are worth and offer before he comes back. That's why I came, instead of writing as we agreed."

"Could not we get them to look at?"

"Perhaps they ain't here at all. Mr. Jones is in correspondence with a friend at London, but I had him watched. Here is the letter.

"'Mr. Green has been out half the day buying paper and parchments. He was very particular about them. They were for his governor, so he said, on the quiet. He did not post anything except the office letters, so you may be mistaken. Shall I knock off? I have still got my eye on him. He changed some stamps at the pub. he uses, for a friend, as he said.' "

"Is that all, Jonathan?"

Jonathan grinned.

"Not exactly. I went to the post-office this morning and see a big letter to be left till called for. It was directed to Mr. Jones."

"I see it all. He is going to do up a dummy lot of papers and sell them first; the real papers he will keep to sell another time."

"Maybe, sir. He's up to almost anything."

"Where are you now?"

"I'm lodging with Jacob Higgs, the parish

clerk. Ain't missus a knifer? She keeps him under her thumb tight as wax."

"When I get the papers I shall return to the Cedars and leave you here to watch, and I don't know how soon that may be."

"Better not, sir. Get all the entries in the register here and at Stratton copied and certified first."

"Right. Higgs told me a story the other day, but I didn't attend to him much, about the registers being tried to be stolen years ago. They must be searched, but the first thing is the papers."

"You can send for me when you want me. I see the vicar coming. Good day, sir."

Jonathan departed, leaving Pod in deep thought. He drew a sheet of paper towards him, and began—

"Littledale.

"DEAR HENRY,

"I have now nearly arrived at the end of my inquiries. They have not been altogether as perfect as I could wish; but time is short, and a great deal remains to be done——" when the door was pushed open and Cyrus rapidly entered, but with unsteady steps. Pod at first thought he had

been “refreshing” too liberally, to gain “Dutch courage;” but a second glance showed him his mistake.

Cyrus threw himself into a chair. He felt as if he must have some one to unbosom himself to, or he would go mad.

“What’s the matter, Cyrus? You left me quite jubilant. What has happened?”

“Some scoundrel has slandered me, Silas. I can’t answer it as I could wish, with a horsewhip, because I don’t know who it is, and I want you to help me.”

“Certainly; except in the horsewhip line. I don’t go in for that.”

“Then I shall go to some one else.”

“No, you won’t, if I can help it, till you are cooler and have a little recovered your senses.”

Silas went out of the room and returned with a bottle of soda-water, into which there was a slight cordial introduced.

“Drink that, Cyrus, and sit still. When you feel better, tell me as much as you are inclined to.”

Cyrus drank it slowly, a little at a time. He

got calmer ; his face slowly resumed a little more of its usual expression.

“ I went down the town and found Clara out. I followed, and met her returning ; and when I spoke she insulted me in the grossest manner. I had no conception before that a woman’s tongue could have wounded any one so.”

“ I had,” said Pod, drily.

“ I told her the papers were recovered.”

“ How did you know that, because they are not ?”

“ You nodded at me as I went off ; I thought you meant it, so I told her the papers were recovered, and that—that—— ”

Pod nodded, but looked very much discomposed. He did not care for the rumour of their recovery getting wind until his own good time.

“ She then, with great cruelty and prevarication, accused me of only coming to her when they were recovered ; and when I said our relative positions made no difference, twisted my words to make me appear the basest of mankind. But it’s all over now. I shall exchange, and go abroad or somewhere else ; I can’t stay.”

"My dear Cyrus, do you imagine no one has ever been refused before or thought that he had discovered the object of his affection unworthy of him."

"She is not unworthy ; some devil has possessed her pure soul to his own base purposes. When she looked in my eyes, a few short days ago, there was trust and affection in her soul, and now it is gone for ever. The chalice is burnt with the fiery draught of sin. It has changed its virgin beauty to loathsome foulness, I felt as I left her."

"She had the worst of the bargain, no doubt."

"Silas, you mock me in my distress."

"Very likely you think so now. Pack up your things, leave here—Smithson will take your duty—and go to the Cedars. If you are right in your supposition, the society of a good and virtuous woman will restore the tone of your mind. I will take the house off your hands, furnished, at a rent that will pay what you will have to give Smithson for taking the duty, and you can have a good rest. That is what you want."

The words of Silas dropped on no very unwilling ear. He resisted letting the house ; Silas could stay, pay the wages, and keep it up if he

chose. In the mean time, he would do as Silas advised him. Silas agreed that the question of rent should stand over for the present.

There were two or three little matters to arrange. Mrs. Parkhouse wanted to go and see her brother in London; so, having wished Matthew and her three children, as she still called them, good-bye, she and the vicar left Littledale in the afternoon. They reached Salisbury, and each went to their respective destinations. Mrs. Parkhouse took with her a substantial mark of the vicar's esteem, and Silas reigned in the vicarage. A servant was procured to assist Sally.

In the course of the day Maurice saw the departing travellers with feelings of the keenest pleasure.

"I ought to have been a general," he said; "the enemy has retreated in confusion."





CHAPTER II.

MAURICE JONES sat in his lodgings. He had purchased extra candle and firing. Having told his landlady he was busy, he shut himself in his bedroom. In the early morning he had taken a walk and recovered the papers, and now, with the paper and parchments from London and the original documents to copy from, he sat down and began to work. It took a long time, but he had got well through a great proportion of it. The liquorice and cochineal were melted in an old jam pot on the hob, which artistically put on, mingled with a little soot, gave a very genuine appearance of age. This he further augmented by the expedient of folding the papers and rubbing the edges on the floor. In order to be prepared for all emergencies, he had made two lists in pencil, which he

carried about with him. The one he intended for Silas was not a perfect list ; he omitted one or two of the most important papers, but was careful not to destroy any of the originals. There was not much work at the office for the present, so he had obtained a day's leave of absence easily, and the work progressed ; but as each paper was copied, he put both original and copy under the boards in a place he had made long ago for other purposes.

But even occupation does not exclude the idea of dinner ; so he sallied out to procure it, which being despatched he went to the office, found nothing very particular had come in, and was returning to his lodgings. While on the way there, he saw the post-chaise bear off Mrs. Parkhouse and her master. To his great delight he fathomed in an instant the event that had occurred, and it made him thoughtful. Events were, he was afraid, running too fast for him. He knew that he could not go on for ever amusing Matthew and Clara's two brothers with pretended news and chimeras ; that suspicion once aroused, he would be doubly mistrusted. Besides, Clara's beauty had really touched his heart, and even success without

her would be robbed of more than half its sweet-
ness. He was also afraid of Clara herself; he felt
she was not yet sufficiently in his power to make
her subservient to his will alone. So, taking a
very careful mental survey of his position, he
determined to manufacture evidence, if he could
not get it otherwise. But this was a risky thing
to do; not that he feared being prosecuted, except
at the last extremity, but he was afraid whose
hands it might fall into. Pondering these things,
he was slowly returning, when he saw the jolly
round face of Jonathan Harker coming up the
street.

“ Halloo, young fellow, you were not at work
to-day. I called and found you out. The office
boy said you would be there to-morrow.”

“ Yes ; Mr. Smith trusts me to do many things
it is not worth while to talk about, and when that
is the case I take a fictitious holiday ; ” and
Maurice grinned. He had gauged Harker’s idea in
coming to him.

“ Come and have a glass.”

“ I don’t mind if I do.”

They adjourned to the Feathers, and sat down

in the bar. Harker tried to lead him into the bar-parlour, but Maurice knew better.

"Rum, cold, with a slice of lemon. What will you take, Mr. Jones?"

"A go of pale brandy, cold," said Maurice, who knew the pale brandy was made by watering the darker spirit. He wished to keep his head clear.

Harker said, as if he had just thought of it, "You remember what I spoke to you about?"

"Yes, I do. Will you come and look at the cottages? I can take a turn before I go back to the office."

They finished their glasses of spirits and went out.

"Cautious bird!" said Harker with a wink.

"What do you mean?"

"Not to talk where we can be overheard."

"Of course, Mr. Harker. What's the use?"

"Certainly, when there is money to be made by being quiet, eh?"

"What do you mean?"

"You asked me that before now. What I mean is this: the papers are worth money, as you know well, and can tell me where I could hear of them."

"Very likely. What then?"

"I could get twenty quid for certain for them ; you can give me a quid for my trouble, and the whole thing is settled."

"You think so, no doubt. Well, if so, you'd better go and find them. I have seen a detective before to-day ; you can't blind me."

"And I have seen a sharp fellow before to-day ; but it don't do to be too cautious, or the market may be spoiled by waiting too long. Things get stale, you know, sometimes."

"Except wine ; that gets better by keeping."

"Maybe. But this ain't business, and that's what I come to talk about. Are you going to cry off, or what ?"

"If you take me to your employer, I am willing to give a hint, if I'm paid for it, not else ; I ain't going to deal with third parties."

"The party I'm dealing for is a gentleman."

"I don't doubt it. I am not. If there was any mistake, his word would be taken before mine very likely, so it's cash down or no deal."

"Suppose he won't deal direct—what then ?"

"Why, others will, and pay more, perhaps. What then ?"

“Perhaps they ain’t any good.”

“Perhaps I have not been in a lawyer’s office for nothing, and I don’t know what’s good and what isn’t?”

“We ain’t much nearer.”

“No, we ain’t, and won’t ever be. Let me see your gent., and I’ll give you a five-pound note out of the money for your trouble when I get it, not before. It’s getting late, and I am going back to the office; besides, ‘tain’t so very far to the vicarage,” said Maurice, significantly.

“You shall come to-day, but if you don’t bring them it’s no use coming,” said Harker, hazarding a shot.

“Very well, I can’t come then, because I can’t bring what I haven’t got. It will take time to get them, which is not my affair.”

“Then you are dealing for some one else. You said ‘no third parties.’”

“Maybe I am, maybe I ain’t. Don’t you trouble yourself; you’ll be paid all right when the time comes.”

Harker was obliged to confess himself “done” for once. In some respects he had failed and yet

succeeded; he had found a clue to the possession, but not to the capture.

"Know any one named Green, Jones?" said Harker, as a last chance.

"Yes. I know a great many green hands, but J. Harker ain't one."

"Come on, young fellow; I'll take you as you wish, but you'll repent it."

"That's my affair. I must go to the office first, and you can come too, to see fair play."

Harker went, but not willingly. He had seen enough to feel he was in the hands of one who had held his own and more in the game they were playing.

Maurice called at the office, and Harker went in. Harold sat at another desk. Maurice went to the office diary, and wrote: "Saw J. Harker about 4, Withycombe Cottages. Query, price to let or sell. Inquired of S. Pod, Esq., Vicarage, for references."

"Please, sir, see to the diary, and I will be back in an hour or so," said Maurice, addressing Harold, who nodded, as the two withdrew and bent their steps towards the vicarage.

Five minutes after, Joshua Smith came in. “ Jones at home, do you know ? ” said he, addressing his son.

“ No ; but he will be here in an hour.”

“ How is that ? He asked for a holiday.”

“ Yes ; but he found some business could be done, and he came back. He has let or sold 4, Withycombe Cottages.”

“ He is a good lad, and sticks to work well: Tell him I want him to go to Stratton with me to-morrow. It is important ; if he does not come back, send him a note.”

As Harker and Maurice drew near the vicarage, Maurice said, with a half sneer—

“ Perhaps you had better go on and prepare the way ; I can wait.”

“ Come in, come in ; it’s all right.”

They were shown into the library and found it empty, but with signs of recent occupation in a heap of papers on the desk, and recently used blotting paper. In a minute Pod entered with feigned surprise. Harker had stolen a march on Maurice for once. As the servant had shut the door, a note was thrust into her hand quietly ; it was

directed to Mr. Pod in pencil. The servant found Pod had gone upstairs to look for a paper in his portmanteau, so gave him the note and told him Mr. Jones and a gentleman wished to see him. He cast his eye over the scrap. It ran :—

“ Won’t deal with me, only with you ; best close the bargain *at once*. Going to try to sell elsewhere.

“ J. H.”

Silas descended with alacrity, and found both sitting, apparently quite at their ease, discussing the weather. One glance at Maurice was quite sufficient to put Silas on his guard ; he saw it was no contemptible antagonist he had to deal with.

“ Good day, sir. Mr. Jones wants to speak to you,” said Harker.

“ Excuse me, Mr. Pod wants to speak with me, which makes a difference.”

Harker was demolished, and, in obedience to a sign from his employer, vanished. Pod waited for Maurice to speak ; Maurice waited to hear the foot-steps of Harker die away, and, besides, he determined the other should speak first.

"Well, Mr. Jones, you didn't come here to say nothing, did you?"

"Yes, I did, unless you are going to speak."

"Well, as you seem averse to, I must consider the interview closed."

Maurice smiled and said, "Perhaps we had better go over the facts as far as we agree."

"Certainly. Item the first: Some papers were lost," said Pod.

"Item the second: Which papers Mr. Pod is desirous of getting possession of quietly," Maurice added.

"Violence is not much in my way."

"Item the third is—for Mr. Pod to specify what he considers them worth."

"I think they are worth twenty pounds, or less."

"Well as you value them at that, I tell you at once I think I had better go to the person whom I represent and tell him you won't give more. But not less than a thousand pounds will he take for them."

Pod jumped out of his chair.

"Are you mad or drunk to think that even a tenth part of that sum——"

"All right. If I ain't a lawyer, I am a lawyer's clerk, and I know the value of them. If I was a qualified lawyer I could get more. The Chivedale estate brings in eight or nine thousand a year."

Pod sat down, feeling he was not hopeful of the result of the interview.

"Suppose they do, Jones, what then?"

"Nothing, except that your client would not thank you to lose them for a thousand down."

"What security have I that they are anything worth having?"

"None, except my word."

"That's not worth much in the eye of the law."

"No, it is not; but I am poor, and want money. If you will draw up a proper agreement, I will take five hundred pounds, and fifteen hundred pounds when your client succeeds. Of course I shall see it is properly attested and signed."

"I'll be hanged if I do."

"Very well. I will sit here just five minutes for you to think it over; if I go out without a promise from you, I shall go elsewhere."

“ And be arrested for stealing them.”

“ Which must be proved to convict me.”

“ My evidence——”

“ With no witness, will not be worth much ; besides, you are trying to get what you cannot prove your claim too.”

“ You take this tone to me, coming with the story that you have purloined deeds which you——”

“ I have not come to you with a story at all ; I have said nothing of the sort, and don’t intend.”

“ What have you come for, then ? ” asked Pod in amazement.

“ To inquire if J. Harker is a responsible tenant of a cottage he inquired about ; that’s my story, which can be substantiated by my entry in the office diary, made before I started ? ”

Pod looked glum ; Maurice had scored one by tricks, and held the trump card as well.

“ Now, Mr. Jones, what is your proposition ? I want to know definitely.”

“ Certainly. Five hundred pounds down, and fifteen hundred pounds as mortgage on the

Chiveydale property when held by your client, so confident am I of the result. If he don't get it, it is waste paper, or rather parchment."

"And from that you will abate——"

"Not one penny. I would rather have the thousand pounds, as I am poor."

"Will you give me a day to think it over?"

"No; I want an answer. I don't expect the money to-day, but your word is sufficient. You see I take your word, though you won't take mine."

"I'll give you five hundred pounds if, on looking over the papers, they are worth it."

"And the mortgage for fifteen hundred pounds, or no bargain."

Pod reflected. The man before him was evidently in earnest. He had a certain amount of legal training, and consequently was to a certain extent an expert. He was quite sure, or why did he agree to wait for a part? True, he asked more for waiting, but that was only natural under the circumstances.

"Come, Mr. Jones, you don't wish to get a sum of money like this to spend. You are much too

careful. Are you going to buy a freehold you have in your eye? In that case, why not buy it? Leave the deeds with me, and we shall then have a check on one another."

" It won't do, Mr. Pod. I want a sum of loose cash for a particular purpose of my own; but if you like, I will tell you what I will do. I will take five hundred pounds down; you can buy a piece of freehold land in my name—not in Littledale, please—for five hundred pounds and hold the deeds, and let me have a receipt for them clearly stating it is mine for services rendered in the holding or recovering of the Chiveydale property. Your client's name need not then appear. You owe this concession entirely to the fact that you supposed I was not a spendthrift, and consequently you had some confidence in me."

" Very well; but how about the papers?" said Pod drily.

" You will come to my lodgings alone, my landlord will witness the deed, and I will give you the papers. I will send you a list in pencil by post, and you can then judge of their importance; you will receive it to-morrow morning."

"I will accede to your demands."

"Call them what you like."

"Famous!" thought Pod. "Harker shall watch where he goes to make out the list, and I may get them cheaper, after all."

Maurice departed, attended by Harker, to whom he chatted quite civilly. As they went by the post-office, he said—

"I am going in; come in, too."

Harker saw him produce the list out of his pocket, borrow a pen and address the envelope, and drop it in the post for "Silas Pod, Esquire, Vicarage, Littledale." Harker suddenly remembered an engagement; Maurice let him go with a smile.

When Harker told Pod, he remarked, "When you have got over him, sir, there is only one more to get over."

But Pod did not answer. He was thinking; and as the light streamed in at the window, he looked out at the heavens. Dark clouds were driving across an otherwise clear sky.

"I am almost afraid of dealing with Jones. Who shall touch pitch and not be defiled?"

And Pod went to dinner only half satisfied with himself. It is not pleasant to handle a snake ; even if you think it does not intend to bite you at present, it feels slimy all the same.





CHAPTER III.

GABRIEL sat in his library chair at Stratton Manor ; he appeared to have got older and thinner, but his spirit burned more brightly than it had done for years. He was looking forward with almost childish delight to the ensuing lawsuit and consequent victory. True, there were flaws in his case ; but they were but links, and these were being filled up every day. His son Edward, too, seemed quite another man ; he had become regular in his habits, comparatively pure in his tastes, and, above all, had devoted himself heart and soul to the thing in hand. Gabriel had become young again in feelings and desires ; he longed with a puerile desire for the time when he could walk through Cliveydale Park and say, “ All is mine ! all is mine ! ” Gabriel’s ecclesiastical friends had

always looked rather grave about his wild youth, but his conduct for many years had been correct outwardly. He always attended public worship when well enough, and appeared to listen to any number of platitudes in the sermon with unction. He had never been tormented with inconvenient speculation for the future, nor had he adopted any distinct school of extreme theology, to torment the most regular cut-and-dried specimen of Mr. Facing-both-ways. Every one pictures in a dim manner the future to be a double of the past in a certain degree. Like a majority of mankind, he looked in a gilt-framed mirror and imagined he was peering through the secrets of eternity, when, in fact, he was only looking at a reflection of his present surroundings, with a bright gilt frame to set it off. He had drugged the immortal afflatus into a long sleep, had resolutely ignored anything unpleasant, and in consequence loaded his soul with a lot of gilt nicknacks and gaudy coverings over anything unpleasant and disagreeable. He looked in the future, as he imagined, when he looked in his mirror. As he had to a great extent succeeded in forgetting any disagreeable incidents of the past,

so in a vague and similar dreamy way he thought that the eye of Omnipotence was equally obliging—this was the centre of his creed—and so deceived himself, of course, for even in his most reflective moments, he did not even to himself admit the whole naked truth.

There is a certain pleasure even in self-deception. We bury the dead out of sight, but the bones remain, and an unpleasant convulsion of nature often reveals the fact in spite of all precaution. Gabriel sat musing; the leaves of the book of his life he had resolutely turned down to forget, as hopes and aspiration for the future filled his soul.

The detective had returned unsuccessful, and had given out so many unpleasant hints and innuendoes that Gabriel and Edward had taken counsel together, the upshot of which was that he was paid and dismissed with scant courtesy. So Jack Harrison had gone back to London, calling down many imprecations on his own devoted head if he took up a private inquiry case again in the country. Edward knocked at the door. His father said—

"Come in. I want to speak with you before Smith arrives."

"Certainly. What do you propose to do if he is too grasping?"

"Wish him good day, but civilly if possible, with all decent despatch."

A servant knocked and brought in Joshua's card.

"I shall leave you and Smith to settle the matter, father; it would be better, I think."

"Very well."

Joshua entered, and Edward went out.

"Good day, Mr. St. John. We will resume the matter in hand at once, if you please."

"Certainly; but there is a preliminary to speak of that cannot be too quickly agreed on."

"What is that?"

"I cannot risk the whole of my property in the matter. It is true I should get the greatest amount of the property, but not all; the expenses would be so heavy. If I can show you the facts are so clear that there is in your mind no doubt, I shall require you to advance me five thousand, to remain in your hands, to be expended in com-

pany with five thousand of my own. If I succeed, I will give you five thousand more as a mark of my esteem and gratitude; if I fail, I cannot afford more than the five thousand I am willing to risk. Is it a bargain or not?"

"I really never take up cases in that way; it is unprecedented in the profession, and I do not think it would suit my purpose."

"Then it will other people's, so we separate. Yes or no?"

"I really was quite unprepared."

"Very likely; but I am not prepared to alter my terms. Shall I take a turn in the garden while you make up your mind?"

Joshua thought it over with lightning rapidity. He knew there was no half way of meeting the difficulty, so, with apparently good grace, he said—

"I agree to your terms, and, if I am satisfied with your claim, will get the deeds prepared, although it is a very unprofessional and unusual thing. I should in consequence wish it kept a secret."

"Whom have I to tell it to—a lonely old man like myself?"

“Mr. Edward is young, and might by accident drop a hint.”

“Then set your mind at rest; it shall never get wind from Stratton Manor.”

“I now look to you to tell me the facts as far as you have ascertained them, Mr. St. John.”

“Esmond Edward left, in the reign of James the Second, four sons—that you can see from any old ‘Peerage.’”

“I will take notes as you go on, if you don’t mind.”

“Certainly. Well, to resume. He left four sons; we have only to deal at present with the first three. Esmond Edward, the eldest, has died, and his successors have died out. The last is just dead, and was in consequence the last Earl of Chiveydale.”

“That is quite clear.”

“Charles James died abroad; at least, so it is reported. I will show you a document to prove it, I think, quite satisfactorily even in the eye of the law. Isadore Percy was the third son, from whom I am descended. I have a lot of the certificates from Stratton Church, and there are some in

the Littledale register you can get before you advance further. What the papers were that Matthew Elgood stole I don't know, but they were important, and would save trouble in many ways ; they were appropriated by a dishonest steward of mine, years ago."

"Certainly ; I follow you. The only flaw I can see is the death of Charles James, which must be proved beyond possibility of doubt."

Gabriel produced two papers which he handed to Joshua.

"I will take the two papers, copy them, and return you copies to-morrow at furthest. The one relating to Charles James is especially important. Or I can call my clerk, and he can do it at once in another room, if you prefer it."

"No ; let him do it here, and we will take a turn in the garden."

"No, we will wait here. He may make a suggestion ; he is very sharp in all such matters as these."

Maurice was summoned, and having completed his task with neatness and despatch, sat waiting further instructions.

"There is another paper," said Gabriel.

"Where?"

"Here. I and my son found it. It is written with sympathetic ink; I will heat it for you to see."

A lamp was lit, and as the paper surrounded the chimney the lines slowly showed themselves as they had before to Gabriel and Edward. Joshua looked in wonder, but he could make nothing of it; he turned to Maurice, who looked at it in wild astonishment, but said nothing, although his lips opened once or twice convulsively.

"Well, do you see anything, Jones?" said Joshua.

"Yes, I see some lines. What are they?"

"That is what we want to find out."

"The paper was put in a secret and safe place; it was not put away and preserved for nothing," said Gabriel.

"Very likely not, sir."

Joshua looked at his watch, and said, "I must go a little further, to see a man named John Steggall about a small matter, and should you wish to see me you can write or send, Mr. St. John. Jones, you can come."

Edward at this minute entered the room.

"Let Jones stay and have some lunch, and you can come in on your return. We will wait dinner for you," he said, with apparently the cheerful hospitality of youth and hope.

"Very well, Mr. Edward, as you so kindly ask me, and if it would not inconvenience your father."

And Joshua departed to try and get a balance of account from Steggall, who had a horse to sell, and Joshua dearly loved a bargain in horseflesh. He could deduct the balance at settlement of account. So, full of these pleasing thoughts, he left, not observing the fact that Edward was suddenly very hospitable, especially to Maurice, whom he had never before noticed with even a nod.

Maurice remained in the library, at Edward's invitation. Gabriel looked surprised. Edward said—

"I have given my word as a gentleman that I will not repeat what I have heard, and am surprised and delighted. Will you do the same, father?"

"I will."

Maurice was silent still. Gabriel again spoke.

"I promise that what you tell me shall be sacredly kept a secret."

"Even from Mr. Smith?"

"Even from Mr. Smith."

"Mr. Jones, father, has discovered the lost papers, and can get them for us."

Gabriel, through delight, gasped for breath; his emotion almost overpowered him.

"But the price is five hundred pounds," said Edward.

"I shan't give it. Let Joshua get them; he could, much cheaper than that, and get Elgood transported."

"Matthew Elgood has not got them, and on the least appearance of law or police they would be burnt, sir. There were other people about that morning. After I left I saw three people coming down the street."

"I didn't. You only told me you knew where they were," said Edward.

"Perhaps not," said Maurice, coolly.

"And what are you going to get out of the transaction?" said Gabriel shortly, with a suspicious glance.

"Fifty pounds, and little enough for risking my situation and bread."

This cool answer staggered Gabriel; he was fully persuaded, as well as Edward, of the genuineness of the story.

"Suppose I refuse to deal and tell Mr. Smith?"

"You promised you would not."

Gabriel and Edward felt beat. They had a trifle over five hundred pounds in the house from some rents received that day, and were so eager to get the papers. Any risk was better than the certain loss.

"But why will not the parties deal with your master?" said Gabriel, with freshly aroused suspicions.

"Because he has bested them in transactions before."

"How can you guarantee the papers will be produced?"

"Because I don't want the money till then. Let Mr. Edward come into Littledale to-morrow, between twelve and one, and I will give them to him in exchange for five hundred pounds in gold."

Notes won't do ; they can be traced too easily by the numbers."

"But if I and my father give you our word ?"

"That will do. You can go with me to the branch bank and change the money, if there are any cheques ; if not, notes and gold will do in that case."

"What do the papers contain ?"

"With great difficulty I got a list from the person who had them. Here it is."

Gabriel and Edward retired to the window. It was a list of certain certificates of the births, marriages, and deaths of their family since their settlement ; also some other documents, value unknown. They conferred in whispers.

"I shall be in Littledale to-morrow," said Edward, with evident sincerity.

"I shall pay the money, but if I can find out the parties I will prosecute them."

"Very well, sir ; then Mr. Edward will bring a letter from you to me as well, exonerating me from blame in the matter."

"I won't do it," said Gabriel, hotly.

"Then I wash my hands of the affair entirely."

"And you won't give them up?"

"I have not got them, and your getting them entirely depends on me."

"I will not write that letter; it might compromise me."

"Then you can send five hundred and five pounds, and I will give Mr. Edward back five pounds, and that will do as well."

Gabriel and Edward again conferred at the window. There was nothing to do but to pay the money. The threat of the documents being burnt was a master stroke of policy by Maurice; they quailed before the possibility.

"I will allow this transaction, Jones, but you must expect nothing more from us in the matter."

"Certainly not, sir. I do not intend to make any demand."

"You had better go to lunch now," said Gabriel, uneasily. He began to find out that the path was not so clear as he had anticipated.

Maurice made a hearty lunch; and when Joshua returned, he found both his host and son very taciturn. They had again consulted, and, judging other people by their own standard, came

to the conclusion that Joshua knew more than he had told them. If he had not, he ought, to have found a clue to the missing documents at any rate, whereas now they would have to sacrifice five hundred pounds down. True, they looked forward to eight or nine thousand a year; but to see the money go out at the first step in this wholesale manner was anything but agreeable.

Joshua drove back to Littledale with Maurice, who was quite sprightly and cheerful after the gloom at Stratton Manor. Maurice turned the conversation in the direction of the late vicar, the Rev. Jonas Cartwright, and found that he had succeeded his father, who had been a very great friend to the late Mr. St. John, who in turn had been at great expense in the renovation of Littledale Church. They then relapsed into silence. As they neared Littledale, Joshua thought he had been too condescending to his clerk, and so determined to bring him to his proper state of mind. Maurice troubled not one whit.

“To think,” he thought, “none of them could see what the drawing meant, with the directions in front of them to use it by almost as clear as daylight! It is too extraordinary almost for belief.”



CHAPTER IV.

MAURICE left the office early, and worked hard at the papers. He had completely finished the duplicates, and was sitting up quietly thinking. With a cunning expression, he took away one or two of the most important from the heap he intended to sell to Silas. "If the case is apparently too good for the other side, they may compromise or retire," he thought, "and I shall be left out in the cold; while, if I am not much mistaken, the papers in the other place will be of vital and overpowering importance."

He was thinking of going to bed very early as he was tired out, when he bethought himself that since the memorable night when he had seen Clara no further communication had passed. The thought drove away all thoughts of fatigue and lassitude.

He knew that another interview in the back lane was highly dangerous for both ; besides, he wished to precipitate matters. The success that attended both his schemes with regard to the papers would, having got the money, render his further residence in Littledale unnecessary. He panted for a wider sphere of action. He had never read "Faust," but had a great idea of the efficacy of jewellery in the matter of women, girls especially ; and as Littledale shone in the matter of gossip, he had induced Harold to buy for him a pair of earrings and a ring. The one he had presented ; the others he had not, wanting an opportunity. The direct way would have been to call at Matthew's, but he dreaded a cross-questioning about the matters he professed to have in hand, regarding which he had not had sufficient time and leisure to concoct a plausible tale ; and he was afraid that chance inspirations, often apparently good at the time, in matters of evidence were often very hard to explain away afterwards. Still, of the two evils, he chose that which he considered to be the least, and called at Matthew's shop. He had laid down a plan of action which he thought would serve, at least for the present.

He found Robert alone. Matthew was out ; he owned one or two little cottages, and had gone to see about some repairs. James had gone out for a walk, to combine business and pleasure. He found, from skilfully put inquiries, that Clara had gone to see Sally Sloper, who lived in a little cottage half a mile off. It was the same place she had been visiting on an errand of kindness when Cyrus had received his dismissal in such a summary manner. Maurice told Robert he would look in later, when they were all at home, and departed in the direction of Sally's hut. Now, it so happened Sally had grown better ; the nourishing food taken her by Matthew's desire had done what no amount of medicine could.

Clara, like other people, naturally took her tone of cheerfulness or gloom from surrounding circumstances, and as she stepped out into the lane the evening shades were falling, and in the yellow gloaming everything looked bright and happy. As she came to the well-remembered turning, she thought of Cyrus with a soft regret. Somehow he had not died out of her recollection. The gentle breeze which swept the corn fields into the

similitude of waves of the sea or bowed the flowers with soft fervour, brought a half regret into her heart. Had he presented himself to her now, all would have been explained and forgiven on both sides; though what Clara had to forgive would be hard to say. She saw a figure approaching, and the vision of peace vanished as she recognized Maurice. Her ambition stirred; his hints of a brighter future than Littledale Parsonage had fallen on a soil only too ready to receive his suggestions. The peace of the evening seemed gone. The clouds that before, in the last rays of sunset, had looked like isles of the blest, and the two or three small pieces of white fleecy vapour above, like bands of angels with white wings hovering above their peaceful home, now seemed regions conquered by some great genius, and the white patches like the smoke of the artillery, not yet rolled away, hanging above the place of victory as if unwilling to quit the scene of their creation, triumph, and glory. The evening star shone with a soft radiance, and behind the dark firs on a neighbouring elevation a bright and clear effulgence of silvery light gave promise

of the queen of night rising in her brightest glory and beauty.

Maurice advanced with the ease of an old acquaintance, but without any appearance of presumption.

"Clara, I have called at your home, and found nearly every one out, so I said I would call later."

"Have you found anything fresh about what you were talking the other day?" said she, ignoring other topics; but her heart beat very fast.

"Yes; but I am more interested in something else."

"What is that?"

"The future of yourself, Clara. I have been working; but you will hear that later, when I call. I was at Stratton Manor on business to-day with Mr. Smith; he will be very busy."

"What about?"

"Mr. Edward St. John's marriage with Sir Lawrence Bunkum's daughter. It is still a great secret, but it was all arranged long ago."

"He always said he hated her."

"He doesn't now, then. But when I was there

I saw the pictures of several Mrs. St. Johns, and they all had beautiful earrings in their ears."

"If they had, what then? I often observed that myself."

"This—that I wish my love to be equally well adorned. See here;" and he held up the pair of earrings in the moonlight.

They glittered, and had never looked so beautiful before as they did in the moonbeams. Clara, quite subdued by the sight, was going to grasp them, when she drew back, and said in disturbed tones—

"I could not wear them; they would ask questions at home how I got them."

"Say they were given you."

"It wouldn't be true."

"No, it wouldn't, because I intend to take payment for them."

"I have no money to spare; indeed, hardly any at all;" and she looked at her shabby gloves.

"Money won't buy them, but this will." So saying, he snatched a kiss and left the earrings in her hands.

"How dare you?" said Clara with heightened colour.

"I dare all except trouble for her I love," said the undaunted Maurice with fervour. His blood began to course through his veins with a heat like molten lead.

"Take them back."

"So I will, if you will return me the payment."

Clara blushed and was silent. The citadel was yielding fast to the enemy, as she said—

"I can't wear them, indeed."

"No; but you can keep them till you can, and if they but once cause you to cast a thought to the donor I am amply repaid."

Clara sighed and put them in her pocket. Maurice handed her a case to put them in, which was taken without protest.

"Now, my love, to money matters. I am richer than you thought me; I am worth a thousand pounds."

"How did you get it?" said Clara, opening her eyes.

"By talent. Your love has made me clever. It was freely given me for services rendered."

"Nothing bad, I hope?"

"Do you think your bright presence would not kill all evil in those who once looked at you?"

Clara gave her hat a coquettish little shake.

"If I have your love, I shall go to London, there to beat out the path to wealth and power."

"People left behind are often forgotten."

"I shall not go alone, Clara. Without you the world holds no power of allurement. Besides, why should you waste your life? Matthew is a very worthy creature, and so are James and Robert; but they are content to grub along in a small and grovelling way, glad to thank for a small purchase any customer that comes to them. They do not understand braver natures and bolder sympathies."

"How do you mean?"

"If you wish me to speak I cannot refuse you. Look at the beautiful larch that stands on the edge of the corn field, and say if you think that the little ears of corn ever hope to be so beautiful and grand. They are cut down and ground into bread for food. Now, that bright form of beauty takes a higher and loftier range of power and fascination, and would the ears of corn dare to say to the

larch-tree, ‘You shall not grow higher than we’? I dare say they would if they could. But it is different among men and women. The grovellers keep down the graceful and beautiful to their own low level sometimes.”

“I don’t see Matthew is to be despised.” She did not mention her brothers; she recollected their fondness for money with disgust, forgetting they worked for her as well as themselves.

“He is not, good man; but in an old age brightened by your gifts, he will bless and look up to you as he ought. You, who are so nobly born! —I often wonder at my own presumption.”

“I am poorer than he is.”

“At present you are not rich, but you will be. Think what even that bad old Gabriel St. John told Matthew.”

They had reached the end of the lane; he had placed his arm round the unresisting waist of the infatuated girl, and was now pressing burning kisses on her cheek and forehead. She put his arm away at length, saying, with a faint attempt at resistance—

“Some one will see you. For shame!”

"Good night, love. I cannot come in to-night; my face would betray my perfect happiness. Are you going to see Sally to-morrow?"

"No."

"Then you will the next day?"

No answer was returned, but Maurice felt certain she would do so. One more fervent kiss, and he was gone.

With wildly beating heart, Clara went in; delay was dangerous. She found Matthew and James returned and expectant, so, without preface, she said—

"Jones won't be here to-night; I saw him as I came along, and he said he would call another evening."

All three auditors felt disappointed, to say the least. Clara went upstairs and took off her things slowly, to recover her usual appearance. When she descended, Matthew and her brothers were deep in the mystery of the stock-book. "Maurice was right," she thought; "they may and will grovel to the end of the chapter."

Supper was soon despatched, and she went upstairs. Having bolted the door, she took out the

earrings, admired and fondled them. Her soul seemed subject to the spells woven round it. Years ago she had had her ears bored; it was a whim of Mrs. Parkhouse's. Taking out the sleepers, she put in the earrings, admired them in the glass, put them away, went to bed, and, for the first time in her life, to sleep without pouring her simple supplications at the throne of grace.

Far away beyond the hills that rose through the darkness of the night, bright in the moonlight, Cyrus sat at his bedroom window. The night air seemed to chill his feverish brow with a cold terror, and as he looked out a part of himself seemed dying. He felt the one flower of existence was fading, and as he closed the lattice he softly murmured, "I feel it has fallen on me. My burden is greater than I can bear. Clara, farewell! my love, my hope, my jewel!" He bowed his head and wept like a child; presently he recovered himself. The emotion had exhausted itself for the time; he felt as if something had gone never to return. His journey was advanced another stage. The manna no longer fell around his tent each morning; he began to eat the old corn of the country, not in

sloth, but girding his loins to go in and possess the land beyond Jordan, and with a holier desire and purer hope for the evil generation who had murmured and were buried in the wilderness.

There is a subtle correspondence in the feelings and thoughts of finer natures that defies analysis and explanation: The materialist is left behind, on his steed of bare intellect, by the speed of faith and hope. Macaulay's line, of the two white heavenly coursers distancing the thing of earth, is an every-day experience of each higher nature :—

“And after those strange horses, Black Aster toiled in vain.”





CHAPTER V.

CYRUS arrived at the Cedars without mistake when he went the second time, but the way seemed much longer and quite dreary. He wondered what he could have seen to admire in the views ; they all looked very artificial and awkward, and the cedar trees themselves appeared very gloomy and out of place. He also fancied that Henry Thompson was not so glad to see him, and that his wife was a little bit too managing of every one about her ; also that the dinner was not as well done as usual.

After dinner Henry was called out. Mary and Cyrus were left alone.

"I am sorry to see you so poorly, Cyrus. We must try and get you well before you return."

Cyrus shifted uneasily on his seat. Mary

feigned not to see the movement, but proceeded skilfully. With the instinctive knowledge that a woman possesses, she saw it was something on his mind, not a bodily ailment.

"Yes," he said at length, somewhat peevishly, and with an absent manner.

"Do you know, Henry is going to have some medicine to-morrow; you had better have a dose too."

Cyrus smiled a feeble smile. It was so unlike his genial face when she had last seen him that she was startled, but continued—

"He was reading a book the other day, and found a recipe for almost every kind of illness. It is standing by earth recently turned over by the spade."

"But how does he get near enough to benefit without getting his toes cut by the gardener?"

"By doing it himself."

"Indeed! And has he benefited by it?"

"Yes, he has greatly. He is quite a new man. He got thinking over the impending suit too much, and has found himself benefited bodily and mentally."

Cyrus was beginning to be interested in spite of himself. He had often preached of the benefit of labour on the human race.

"So, Cyrus, I want you to help me to-morrow."

"How can I, Mrs. Thompson?"

"By going out with Henry when he digs, and lending him a hand."

"I shall not be of much use, I am afraid."

"Oh yes, you will. He will not want to leave off too soon, if you help him; his pride would forbid it."

"I will try my best, but really I don't think I could do much."

"We none of us know what we can do till we try."

"Had you not better get some one else?" said Cyrus, trying to slip away. He foresaw that on the next day he would not have much time to nurse his grief in solitude.

"Nothing of the sort. I have often heard Henry say how you always spoke of him with affection, and now you pretend it is not sufficient to induce you to give up a couple of hours for his benefit."

"Yes, I will," said Cyrus, with something of his old animation and fire.

Mary saw she had touched the right string; that the mention of his own illness irritated rather than benefited him.

"Now, then, you two conspirators, what are you at? Plotting mischief?" inquired Henry, as he came in.

Cyrus tried to shrink back into his shell, but found the attempt a failure. His hostess remorselessly pulled him out again by saying—

"You two are going to dig for a wager tomorrow. I shall mark out a piece of ground and tie your spades with blue and red ribbon."

Rousing the loyal portion of his nature, Cyrus asked, "And what is to be the reward?"

"Fie! that is wanting to gain information that is not public property yet. You two work; and I promise you that after you have finished the one who has done best shall carry my basket. I am going into the lane a quarter of a mile off, through the park, where one of my pensioners lives. He is an old soldier. I think Cyrus would be interested in him."

"Of course. 'The proper study of mankind is man,'" said Henry, with a ready acquiescence that left Cyrus no hope of backing out.

"Come, Henry, you must have a game of chess with Cyrus. I will set the men out, and then I must leave you two of the superior sex, as baby will want me."

The board and men were produced, and the hostess retired.

"You will be sure to beat me; I am out of practice."

"Nothing of the sort, Cyrus. The game of chess is capable of such infinite variety that every player leaves the mark of his own individual mind on the play."

"So a man is a good or bad player because of the strength or otherwise of his mind? I must try and win after that."

"Nothing of the sort. Chess is only a shadow, through which our minds find a reflection as certainly as the needle turns to the Pole. There is an infinite variety in the mind of man: so there is in the play. One plays a certain set of moves, and captures a pawn with delight, but is often beaten

by the adversary giving him a fictitious advantage in an exchange. This style of player is very wearying. He does not play to enjoy ; he plays to win. Then there is the player of brilliant strategy, who generally fails, but makes the game so interesting that his adversary seems to lose instead of gain—like the Celtic races, who are interesting rather than successful, splendid orators but wretched administrators. There is also the player who apparently leaves an opening and suffers the loss of a piece that he may distract his adversary's attention from his own attack on a vital point, and so carries the game, sometimes when all hope seems lost. Again, there is the player who waits for an opening in his adversary's defence, and pushes the lance home with relentless vigour."

"I never knew chess was such an interesting mental study before."

"It is more than that ; it is an infallible key to the mind of the player. Although bound by the rules, the original mind comes out like a palimpsest as certainly as the night follows the day."

"But the cleverest men have not been the best players?"

"I said before the game was only a shadow, a reflection. The most handsome people do not always make the best-looking photographs, and yet the photograph must be true; but it is only a shadow."

"Our life is described as a shadow, and yet joy and grief, pain and pleasure, love and hate, are pretty distinct."

"Yes; but they are all, on this side the dark portal, unreal to a certain extent. We may feel joy at what brings sorrow eventually, and grief at perhaps our greatest good. But come, put up the men and we will begin."

The game proceeded in silence. Henry swept off the best of Cyrus's pieces, till, turning on his enemy, he in turn attacked and took piece after piece. When the slaughter was over for a few moves, an unconsidered pawn of Cyrus's crept up and became a queen. In two or three moves he cried "Checkmate."

"That's too bad! your queen taken and line of defence broken through, and to win the game after all with a beggarly pawn," said Henry, laughing.

"Good night, Henry; the game has done me more good than I could have thought possible."

And, shaking hands, the two men separated for the night.

When Henry retired, he and Mary talked over the diagnosis of Cyrus's complaint with great interest. They both agreed it was mental rather than physical.

"Let him be; he'll come round best by himself," said Henry.

"I shan't do anything of the kind. If he will only dig for an hour in the garden, and go with me to see Corporal Bennett, he will be in a fair way towards recovery."

"Are you going to cure a troubled mind by physical exertion and leaving tracts with your pensioners?"

"Don't you remember a pawn carried the day at chess to-night when the more powerful pieces failed?"

"Yes. Good night; I'm going to sleep," said Henry, rather shortly. It is not pleasant to be reminded of defeat, even if it was only at chess.

Next morning Cyrus awoke refreshed. He had

dropped asleep the night before while thinking over his troubles. He still considered his life a failure. At breakfast he looked at the daily paper; it gave an account of the Fiji Islands. He thought he would go out as a missionary, and was thinking of writing a letter to a friend of his in London, asking him to make inquiries, when Henry came in and lugged him off for an hour's hard work.

There are very few states of mind that sixty minutes employed in digging will not alter. As the perspiration rolls off the face, so the dark thoughts roll away from the mind. Cyrus gave up the missionary project; he had merely taken it up in a pet. His was not the cast of mind suitable for the work, and he knew it; he had conceived it in haste, and if carried out it would only have been carried out in temper. He would have done no good if he had ever arrived at a missionary station. The subscriptions he paid every year, and those he raised, were a great deal more to the purpose. Nut bushes don't bear kidney beans, but we are very glad to have them to let the beans run up for a support; beans can't grow up of them-

selves, or nut sticks bear beans instead of nuts.
“ Each in its place ” is the golden rule.

Cyrus came in from the garden. He had half recovered the healthy tone of his mind, but he still sat down rather moodily to lunch, having washed and removed the more salient marks of the gardening operations.

Henry said he was going to read till dinner-time, so Mary and Cyrus sallied out. They went across the park, and Cyrus thought it looked fresher than yesterday, and silently wondered why. He forgot that one requisite of a healthy mind is a healthy body, and he had opened the pores of his skin by an hour’s digging. The pendulum swung more regularly, but the mainspring was still awry in the human machine; it did not yet work quite smoothly. They passed the park and entered a lane. Further on they came to a little cottage; it was very small, but beautifully clean and bright. In the empty fireplace a bunch of wild flowers was placed to fill it; they were not selected with the best taste, perhaps, as dandelions predominated to an almost blinding extent. Over the mantelpiece was an old regimental badge, bright as silver. A

few other things of the cheapest description completed the furniture. Mary looked round in surprise ; there was no one in, but in a short time a one-legged man came in, who gave Mrs. Thompson a military salute.

“ Servant, sir,” said he to Cyrus with another flourish.

“ I want some potatoes, Bennett. Can you spare me some ? ”

“ Certainly, ma’am, with pleasure.”

“ As you won’t let me buy them, we can exchange,” said Mary, with a smile, producing a packet of tobacco.

Bennett’s eyes glistened, but he said rather sadly, “ It’s more than they are worth, ma’am.”

“ Nonsense, Bennett ; I am the best judge of that. Where is Susan to-day ? ”

“ Gone out. She has a day’s work at Farmer Crane’s.”

“ Oh, that is a short distance, and I want to see her. Would you mind showing Mr. Clark your garden ? ”

“ With pleasure, ma’am ; ” and Mary was gone before Cyrus could enter a protest.

Corporal Bennett had but one leg, and had suffered from the effects of a tropical climate, so he rather painfully dragged himself into the garden, which topic was soon exhausted. They then sat down to await the return of Mrs. Thompson.

Cyrus began to bethink himself, as he judged from the tobacco incident the corporal was not too well off, how he could give him something without offending the honest pride of the old soldier, and by way of opening the conversation began by saying—

“That is a nice pipe of yours, Bennett. In the part of the country I come from we make very good ones. I will bring you one next time I come, if I can.”

“Thank you, sir, kindly, but I am fond of my old pipe ; it seems to talk to me when I am alone.”

“You must be glad to sit down quietly, after your life of adventure, in your own village again.”

“This is not my village, sir. I come from Yorkshire.”

“Indeed ! I should have thought you would have preferred to be with your own people.”

“So I should once, but I am used to this place

now. Besides, I must pay my debts as far as I can."

Cyrus was silent ; he saw he had incautiously stirred the ashes of the past, and that they were still warm. But the old soldier continued—

" Yes, sir, I was a wild lad, and I had not long 'listed when the Mutiny broke out in India. I and several of ours volunteered to go, and were accepted. We marched up the country where the railway didn't run. We was all like brothers, for we did not know any minute but them blacks would be on us ; there's nothing like perils to bind folks together. Well, there was four of us always marched together ; we shared our rations, and helped each other in every way. One day Bill died of the fever—I don't know what his right name was ; he 'listed under a false one—so there was only three of us left. All of us seemed to get closer together in a week than some people do to their neighbours all their lives in England, but us three was closer than brothers. The heat was awful one day ; I was on picket duty, and felt as if I should faint. The water ran short, and the men durstn't drink of the wells and tanks at the roadsides, 'cause

they was all poisoned ; leastways some was, we didn't know which. There was a cup of water served in the morning and another in the evening. Well, I was relieved about one o'clock, and I threw myself down when I got into camp. Every one's temper a'most was short, and no wonder with the heat. The post had come in ; those as got letters was a-reading them over and over, to try and forget the heat and dust. Well, my head began to swim, and I knew what it meant, and asked Jim Sayers to go to the doctor. He went off in the heat, but came back and said the doctor couldn't come. I knew what it meant—that he was down like so many more. But Jim brought back something as good ; it was half a cup of water. I wanted to drink it, but he wouldn't let me, it was too precious ; so he damped a rag, and I sucked it, and then he damped a piece of his shirt he tore off and put over my head. Wasn't it lovely ? He'd bought the water very dear, as you shall hear. As the enemy's bugle sounded, he said, 'Lie still till we march : you shan't be left behind, Bennett.' He called me Bennett 'cause I was a lance-corporal. Jim Sayers and Alf Miles came back and told me a

lie, but it was a kind lie. They said as how I was to have double allowance of water; and I drank it, God forgive me! and never said thank'ee for it.

“We always marched at night if there was a moon, and when the column was ready, there was Jim carrying my musket as well as his own, and Alf carrying my belts and pouch. We staggered on, and halted at daybreak, and had scarcely piled arms when the alarm was given the blacks was on us, and, what was worse, they had a cannon—one of ours they'd stolen. We fell in, began to fire, and I saw the blacks begin to fall. But what was the use? They were twenty to one, and the cannon cut our ranks up fearfully. Every large white puff of smoke we had to close up, for there was somebody killed. I can't remember very well, but I found I'd fallen down faint. Jim and Alf closed up, and went on firing; there was no time to think of those down. By-and-by I looked through the legs of the men above in a daft way. I heard a cheer from our men, and saw a party charge and capture the cannon; but just before they were beat off it, a nigger put a light to the touch-hole. The captain picked him down with a

revolver, but not quite quick enough. A puff of smoke followed, and then a heavy thud, and I knew that Alf and Jim was atop of me, stone dead. Afore that I'd felt faint and weary, and fit to die in a ditch. 'Twas all gone in an instant. Struggling up, I seized my musket, and every shot I fired told. My hand didn't tremble or shake, 'cause I felt no fatigue. I ran as well as any one when the colonel in front shouted 'Charge!' His horse had been shot early in the fight. When we came back and had answered to the roll, I fell out and looked in the pockets of Alf and Jim. In Jim's pocket I found a letter dated from the village down yonder, saying his little girl was ill, and more money must be sent for medicines and nourishing food.

"'Jim was a good fellow,' said a sergeant, as he walked by. 'I gave him half a cup of water, and he promised he'd give me all his cup this morning. I wish I hadn't took it now. I say, corporal, hadn't you best get your leg seen too ?'

"I put down my hand and it came up bloody. I was shot in the leg; and, what with a piece of my uniform being shot into it, and the heat and my

bad health, the leg had to come off. I had a little bit of prize-money and a pension, so I got home to England. When I came to the village, I see a little maid, all dirty, crying in the gutter; so I picked her up, and found the gal as had to mind her had gone to play, and, lo and behold! it was Jim's little girl when I came to inquire. Her mother was dead. When the people as had her found I wanted the child, they wouldn't give her up; but Lord Chiveydale heard of it, and she's bin with me ever since. She will be married soon, and then I can go."

"Where, Bennett?"

"To where I shall see Jim, Alf, and Bill, to be sure; and I shall be sure and tell Jim how his little gal is growed, or else maybe he wouldn't know her when she went to him, especially if one of her children, if she has any, was to go first. He might get confused like."

Cyrus did not attempt any disarrangement of Bennett's ideas of the future; he only thought how small, how paltry his own fretting was beside the man before him, and he made the discovery that although the blossom of the tree called love

was withered, there yet remained several beautiful leaves in the various duties of life. His love was not dead, only it seemed a long time ago that it had happened. The brightest and happiest earthly future might not be his; but, in the discharge of the duties of life—the help to those fallen by the wayside and the proclamation of eternal truths, by life as well as precept—there might yet open to the eyes of the soul, even here, a dim reflection of that state “where they are not married or given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven.”

Mrs. Thompson called for Cyrus, and they went back together, talking on indifferent topics, till, seeing they had nearly reached the Cedars, Cyrus took out a five-pound note, and said—

“Would you please buy something for Susan’s wedding *trousseau*? ”

“Certainly. It will be very soon; they would feel honoured if you would go.”

“No, thank you. But, hark! I think I hear the first dinner bell;” and Cyrus vanished into the house.

Mary went upstairs to her room, and as Henry came in to dress for dinner, she said, “It is a serious thing about Cyrus.”

“How so? Has he told you?”

“No, he hasn’t in so many words; but I know the girl has refused him, and, what is worse, he will remember her all his life.”

“Dear me! that’s a long time. Some people get over these things.”

“Henry, you are aggravating to say so! Cyrus has a noble nature and feels deeply.”

“So he has, my dear. When a crab loses a leg, it grows again; when a man does, he makes a wooden one; when a donkey has his leg broken, he is shot.”

“Exound thy riddle.”

“When a very shallow person is disappointed, he forgets it entirely; when a really good and great character is, he apparently does so, but the leg is only wood; when a fool is, he takes to vice and kills the noblest part of his nature.”

Dinner was over, and in conversation the evening slipped away.

Cyrus retired early to his room, and, sitting at the window, tried to fit a wooden leg to the wound. Courage, *mon enfant*, you are shaping it of lignum vitae!



CHAPTER VI.

MARY THOMPSON sat in her chair and vacantly looked at the red-ware tea pot that was standing all but empty before her. The christening of the baby would take place in a couple of hours, and the young gentleman would become “Esmond Edward Henry St. John ;” but her thoughts were not with baby, or her guest, or her husband, but of Silas Pod and his doings. His letters, received every other day, had become strange in their matter. One had arrived that morning, which had caused Henry great uneasiness and perturbation of spirit.

Henry had never had much of a practice, because it was small when he bought it, and he had, comparatively, taken no pains to increase it. The stewardship of the Chiveydale property and his own private means had quite sufficed for his

wants. The prospect that opened before him had dazzled his eyes but not confused his brain, and, what was the more extraordinary, had not overcome his sense of right.

Cyrus had strolled away into the park, with a delicate appreciation of the fact that his host and hostess wished to discuss a private matter. Scarcely had he turned his back, when Henry went into the outer room, closed the door, and again drew forth the letter which had given him such uneasiness. He knew that Silas liked him extremely, and that Pod's idea of men in general was —well, acquired from a long experience in the law, and not exactly that which he, Henry, took of all cases brought before him. Besides this, the letter was not of a very reassuring sort.

“ My dear Mary, now we are alone I will read to you again the letter I received from Pod. I am uneasy in the extreme at the substance and hints conveyed by it.

“ ‘ Littledale.

“ ‘ DEAR HENRY,

“ ‘ I want you to send me, in a registered letter, one thousand pounds in ten and twenty

pound notes. Take the numbers and send them in another letter the next day. You need not keep a copy of them, as I will see to that. If your balance is not sufficient, let Mary give you the rest. Don't overdraw on any account. This is very important. I have burnt the first letter I wrote, or rather half wrote, as events of the gravest importance are occurring here. I have still every belief in your claim being successful, but shall be obliged to buy some evidence very dearly, which, after all, I may not use, but it will be of use to your case nevertheless—it may be of the greatest. I enclose an order on Jabez Starks, who will give you a paper. Read it if you like, but send it to me in a separate enclosure, also registered ; I particularly want it for reference. I shall not return as soon as I thought ; in fact, I have taken the vicarage off Cyrus Clark's hands for the present, and shall retain possession of it for some time. It is, Henry, a camp of observation near the enemy's fortress.

“ ‘ Give my remembrances to your good wife. I hope she has been able to secure Cyrus Clark at the Cedars. It is most important he should not

return to Littledale for the present; he would hamper my operations. I want a house to myself, and it would hardly do to keep him out of his own.

“ ‘Yours truly,

“ ‘SILAS POD.

“ ‘Mr. Henry St. John Thompson, The Cedars.’”

Mary looked very earnestly at the face of her husband when he had finished, and waited for him to speak.

“ I am afraid, my dear, that Silas, in his desire to carry my case to a successful issue, is buying what if lost can never be recovered, my peace of mind.”

“ How can you put such a construction on his letter, Henry ? ”

“ By reading between the lines. Evidence that has to be bought at such a price, and that will perhaps not be produced, means corruption and chicanery. I do not, like many people, say the whole world would not tempt me, but I do feel that the spirit of truth and love of justice is sufficiently strong in my nature to prevent my gaining by a shuffle or worse.”

“ You are very unkind to suspect Silas, who is such a friend to you, of such things.”

"My love, I only mean to say Silas, by the very strength of his friendship, would do things for me he would not for himself or his own interests."

"You forget your father devoted his life to inquiries in the matter, and after years of doubt stated your case perfect. He was a lawyer like yourself, and would not be led away by a Will-o'-the-wisp."

"Yes; but he considered a certain document conclusive, which I fear is not so."

"Have you read it?"

"No, my dear."

"And I have no doubt the paper in question is the one wanted. Take it and read it; question it then if you like, but I should not."

"I have it in my pocket. I rode over before breakfast and got it from Starks. It is here."

Henry produced it, and, despite the crabbed writing, he found very little difficulty in reading straight on :—

"Isadore, my brother, who started to subdue Amalek, has turned aside from the right path and utterly perished. Never more can I behold my

brother ; he is dead. Balaam has tempted once more by the beauty of the Moabitish woman. His place shall know him no more, and my descendants may die ; they may perish ; my race may die out. Charles James perished in battle with the Turks ; his grave shall be wet with the tears of those who think of his end. But the race of Isadore Percy shall never sit in the seat of honour at Chiveydale Hall. Charles James died with honour and glory ; his sun went down while it was yet day. But Isadore Percy has gone down into the darkness of sin and corruption. Like King David, the sword shall never depart from his house for ever. Though he approach and be received before the throne of Dutch William, his seed shall never inherit ; he hath done great wickedness. To Joseph Henry, my brother in honour as well as blood, I leave the task, should my seed fail, of holding our lawful inheritance from him who deceived his neighbour, and stole his most precious possession.

(Signed) “ESMOND EDWARD,

“Earl of Chiveydale.

“Written and attested by Paul Sterling, priest
in holy orders, July 15, 1689.”

"I see, Henry, from this document that the descendants of Isadore are cut off for ever."

"I don't. He may have been a Jacobite. There is an allusion to Dutch William, instead of King William, which is very suspicious, to my mind."

"There are allusions, in fact three or four, to Bible history. What does that prove, then?"

"That it was drawn up and remodelled by the clergyman, Paul Sterling, as stated. The clergy in those days always gave all their documents a sprinkling of Bible figures and names, like we put salt on meat to keep it palatable."

"What a comparison! But now to the subject before you, Henry."

"Well, love?"

"Silas is a better judge than you in the matter; he writes cheerfully, and I am sure would not unless he thought what he wrote."

"It is not what he wrote, but what he thought the justice of the case. I could not, even on the low ground of expediency, take possession by a trick."

"Who proposed it?"

But not heeding the interruption he went on. “If I succeeded to Chiveydale Hall so, could I ever look a beggar in the face? I could not. The thought would intrude: ‘He might be the person who ought to be in your place and possessing your grandeur. You got it by a trick and evasion.’”

“My dear, you are excited and draw a very gloomy picture. I do not admit for an instant your supposition; but if it was true, does not Antonio succeed, in the ‘Merchant of Venice,’ by the flaw in the deed of no mention of blood?”

“You bring to my mind a most unhappy parallel. The old Jew, Shylock, bereft of daughter, wealth, and home, condemned to linger on a miserable existence by the charity of his enemy, is one of the saddest pictures Shakespeare ever drew. He did not see it; the times were not sufficiently enlightened to give pity to the sufferings of a Jew.”

“You can turn anything any way. I shall not argue, but rather persuade you to look at it in the right light. You are not asked to countenance injustice to any one. You are overborne with excitement. I should love you less if you wished to gain the cast at all hazards, even by loaded

dice. But there is a healthy and an unhealthy state of mind and conscious feeling. You have not had enough exercise lately; you have not been obliged to walk of late, and the consequence is, the mind, being unemployed, is eating itself away."

"Well, Mrs. Doctor, what food am I to take, mental or bodily?"

"Both. Take Cyrus for a good walk till dinner; talk of indifferent topics; put your difficulties before him, if you will."

"I don't care to; but I will take your advice, having posted the letters. How about the money?"

"Take a walk to the bank; here is a blank cheque I have signed, my dear. Let Cyrus go with you, and you will return cured of the vapours. The fresh air will blow them away."

Henry departed, unclosed the outer door, and was gone. The nursery maid appeared and asked about the christening.

"It will not be till the afternoon," said Mary.

"What, ma'am, put off the christening?"

"Certainly."

And she put it off till the afternoon, when the

ceremony took place. It was a very quiet one, and the three friends sat down to dinner as usual. Cyrus was the most cheerful of the party. Henry had sent off the money and enclosures in the morning, and after he had posted them a certain amount of responsibility seemed lifted from his shoulders ; he felt easier, but not entirely at rest. Mary drew aside the window curtains and looked out. The moon shone brightly.

“ Come, we ought to celebrate baby’s christening by something.”

“ What shall it be, dear ? Give us an idea.”

“ I know a very good idea, if you are not afraid of taking cold, Mrs. Thompson,” said Cyrus.

“ What is it ? ” said Mary eagerly.

“ A row on the lake in the moonlight,” said Cyrus.

“ Splendid ! I always said you were a lad of genius,” Henry remarked.

“ Yes ; but you two gentlemen must row and I steer. I can’t have the gamekeeper ; it would spoil the romance.”

“ Agreed,” said both, and they started.

The moon shone brightly. James, the man of

all work, was despatched for the key of the boathouse, and was to meet them at the lake. The park seemed bathed in a bright soft glory of its own. The boat, a good broad one, with no danger of tipping over, was shoved from the shore, and James sent home. They soon ceased pulling, and only gently stirred the water to keep the boat just moving. The ruins in the centre of the lake, shadowed with trees, rose dim and mysterious; the banks looked like black ribbons against the bright water; and, further on, the grass seemed like ruffled water and the smooth water like firm, solid ground around them.

“I love the moonlight, even if it is silly and juvenile to do so,” said Mary slowly, as she looked at Chiveydale Hall standing in the background.

“I think,” said Henry, “that the great attraction of the story of the Magi is the star that led them. It appeals to the human heart of all ages and all countries, else why is it such a favourite subject with painters?”

Cyrus objected to the idea of painters being put first, and said, “I don’t think painters the greatest artists.”

"But pictures are the books of the ignorant," said Henry.

"And savages. The sciences of architecture and sculpture are very fine—so are oysters pleasant to the taste—but only leave the shells for after ages. We cannot realize the feelings and thoughts of the man who built the Pyramids, except in a vague manner. The painters of a few centuries ago only excite admiration; they seldom stir the heart of the beholder."

Mary was silent and abstracted. She was gazing, in a dream of wonder and ecstasy, at the stars and at the moon that had risen high in an almost cloudless sky.

"They stir the heart of the educated, Cyrus."

"Yes, there is the mistake. I remember, some years ago, you had a galvanic battery, and made copper counterparts of various casts and medals; they were very good, but they were only counterparts at best. So the sight of a picture may strike off galvanic casts."

"Then what do you consider the great art or science?"

"Poetry. It survives all others."

"There are very few good poets."

"Quite true. But one good poem not only lives for after ages, but strikes responsive chords in the hearts of all hearers, and produces numberless beautiful new phases of the idea."

"Like the galvanic casts you spoke about?"

"Rather, like the electric wire that binds together all nations, kindreds, and tongues. The news of one continent acquires new interest in another, calling up fresh feelings and emotions."

"It may be."

"Still I think the more you reflect the more you will see that poetry appeals to every age. Read the Book of Job. You realize every turn of thought expressed in it, but I doubt if one of the pictures of his time were preserved it would excite anything but curiosity. If you could see his tents, you would find them very much like the tents of the Arabs of the present day."

"Do you exclude secular poetry? Because savages that were fond of the pictures as you described them were equally fond of poetry."

"It was their aspiration after something better that made them like it. The bard passed unharmed from camp to camp."

" Songs pass through many forms among many nations. The sayings in verse certainly never die out. 'Only let me make the ballads of a nation and I care not who makes the laws,' I admit, Cyrus, in all fairness."

" Yes; and the sentiment of most poetry is good, though the actions described are bad."

" I have often thought the love of the Jews for music was fostered by the tradition of the statue of Memnon greeting with songs the morning sun."

Mary here suddenly broke the silence she had preserved, and said, " I think that all you have said may be very profound, but how comes it that coins are a more faithful guide than even poetry? Yes, Cyrus, a coin of Thothmes the Third is fourteen centuries older than Homer. How does poetry stand with regard to the facts?"

" By itself that coin is worthless; but it is a part of the history of the land of the Pyramids, the home of Moses, linked with the names of Joseph and Abraham, whose lives were each a poem and would be preserved, even if not true, as much as Homer has preserved the fate of Troy," said Cyrus.

" Well," said Henry, " you have really half

convinced me ; and if those passed away can look back, I really think Moses would find more pleasure in his psalms than in the recollection of leading a stubborn and wilful race, even miraculously, through the wilderness, and David would recollect——”

“ You forget that, if he can look at one thing, he can at another ; and how would David feel when he saw, all through the course of ages, the sword never depart from his house ? ”

Mary uttered a little cry of joy, and said, “ Thank you, Cyrus ; you have cleared the way and swept a cobweb from my brain. Let us go home, if you gentlemen don’t object.”

Henry and Cyrus soon brought the boat to land, and all three walked home. Henry was much better ; he had seen the fair form of Chiveydale Hall in the moonlight, and he dismissed his fancies in regard to Pod’s proceedings. But when they were in their bedroom, he remarked—

“ You took me out to see Chiveydale Hall by moonlight ; I feel nothing of those compunctions now. I am afraid it was like a draught of wine ; it deadened my ideas.”

“ No, my dear ; it was a draught of wine, but to

refresh, not deaden. Alcohol is one of the finest remedies in the range of science."

"But the disappointment will be greater."

"You shall not be disappointed. Cyrus made a remark that solved the riddle of the document we were reading."

"How so? I am getting excited."

"Why, the words, 'The sword shall never depart,' meant that Isadore had run away with some one's wife, to be sure."

Henry, though he was a lawyer, fairly danced with delight.

"I see it all, and will write to Pod to-morrow."





CHAPTER VII.

EDWARD ST. JOHN went to get his father's blessing and the cash before he went into Littledale for the documents Maurice had promised him. Gabriel said with emphasis, as he was counting the money—

“If you see any reason to draw back, do so, Edward. The risk is more yours than mine.”

“I will, father. But I don't mistrust Jones a bit; he openly said he was to get fifty pounds, and, besides, he doesn't seem to care a bit for the people who hold the documents, only for his own safety.”

“That is certainly one point in his favour. Do you think that, after all, Elgood had them, and is employing him?”

"No, I don't. If Elgood had them, he wouldn't go to work in that way; at least, not at first."

"I don't know. The lower orders are very cunning."

"Maybe, father. But I want to speak to you of another matter. The entries in Littledale Church ought to be verified at once; had I not better stay and do it to-day? I can put up my horse at the Feathers."

"Do you want to get pelted again? We were the last time."

"So we might well be—we had failed; but after the *mêlée*, a lot of roughs went to Elgood's shop, and demanded beer. He was ill, or pretended to be, and they saw the eldest young Maunder, who gave them sour words."

"And they were quite pleased, I suppose, at their reception?"

"Yes. They went away swearing that if they had only known what he was going to give them, they would have pelted him."

"Capital!"

"I also, on my own responsibility, sent a few

orders to one or two of the other traders, with the cash, and we are quite popular now."

Edward took up his hat and departed with the money. The morning was bright, the roads good, and his spirits buoyant.

It had happened as Edward had said: the refusal of beer to the roughs of Littledale, coupled with the receipt of orders and cash from Stratton Manor, had turned the tide of popular opinion. The cause of popularity or the reverse is a curious inquiry in the affairs of life. The manners of the great Duke of Marlborough were so polished that they conciliated every one, though he gave nothing, and, if history is true, took a great deal. The man of suave manners is always popular, while he who gives even to half his kingdom is not. Philosophers have given two reasons for this paradox, which certainly do not afford a very cheerful view of human nature generally: first, those of suave manners assure all applicants of their sympathy, and regret their inability to satisfy them; second, if Tom cannot get a thing, he is inwardly pleased that Jerry didn't. There is no sight more galling to non-success than that of triumphant endeavour.

Slaves are generally merry, and free men grave. Can this also be accounted for by the same course of reasoning, namely, that slaves know they can't rise from their present condition, and free men see their fellows doing it daily? Some have accounted for this by saying free men feel their responsibilities. In that case, the chimpanzee at the Zoological Gardens has apparently a great load on his shoulders, if gravity is considered an unfailing criterion.

Edward put up at the Feathers. He had never had so great an amount of money in his possession, all at one time, before. True, his was only the task of paying it over; but it raised his spirits, nevertheless, many degrees. Maurice was also quite jubilant; he saw wealth and power before him, almost within his grasp. So, when they met at his lodgings and transacted the business, Maurice felt walking on air. But he insisted on the five pounds passing backwards and forwards with a strange pertinacity; the which being accomplished, the two adjourned to the Feathers. They went to the bar-parlour this time, and drank success to their undertakings.

"I feel quite as if I was to share in your good fortune, Mr. Edward, indeed I do, when I think that I was a humble instrument to further it."

"Very good, Jones," said Edward, in a patronizing tone.

"How is Mr. Gabriel? Quite well, I hope."

"I shouldn't think you were very interested in him. You two didn't seem to pull together the other day at all."

"Perhaps we didn't; but both you and he will know me better some day."

"And then what will happen?"

"You will judge me truly," said Maurice, with humility.

Edward laughed and thought of the future with pleasure.

"Well, Jones, you have a good slice of success to begin with. I suppose you are in high feather at present; you have got all you wanted?"

"Well, sir, for poor people like myself, it is a good pull, no doubt; but you always had everything you wanted."

"No, I haven't. I want to verify the entries at the church to-day. I am going to stop and

do it, and you can come to certify the same as well as Higgs. So you see I want something else."

Maurice's heart almost stopped beating. The keys were at the vicarage, and Pod held them, in the absence of the vicar. Here was a complication with a vengeance. But he quickly came to the call of time, and said—

"Mr. Clark has gone away; the keys are with a Mr. Pod. Don't you remember him at the court the other day?"

Edward paid a passing tribute to Silas in flowers of rhetoric that need not be repeated. Maurice continued—

"Had I not better go and get them for you? You would hardly care to see him again, sir."

"I ain't afraid of any one; but you can go, and meet me at half-past three, sharp, at the church door. Look up old Higgs, and tell Smith to charge your time; though that is hardly necessary advice to a lawyer—he will be sure and do it without any suggestion."

"Good day, then, sir; I shall be there;" and Maurice departed, hardly knowing what to do.

He went to his lodgings and got the other lot of papers, tied a string to them, and fastened them to his braces at his back.

"I will surrender them only with my life, unless I get the cash." Saying which, he went to the office, and found Joshua hard at work. Harold was out, so he began at once—

"If you please, sir, Mr. Edward St. John wants some one to go with him to the church. He wants to search the registers."

"Very well; I will go, Jones;" and Joshua looked ruefully at a mass of letters yet to answer and see to.

"If you are busy, sir, I can go and spare you the trouble. When we have the dates you can go and verify them another day, when you are more at leisure," said Maurice, with a tone of mild suggestion and deference.

"Good idea. Go and tell him it would be better we went at separate times. If he wants to see me, I can see him here, where we shall not be overheard."

Jones thought differently with regard to not being overheard, but said nothing on the subject,

and departed with unusual alacrity and despatch to the vicarage.

Edward, when left by Maurice, sat thinking ; he had still some time to kill, and, with a sigh, wondered how he should get rid of the interval. John Tyack was not a very good hand at conversation ; Mrs. Tyack did not encourage the attentions, beery and otherwise, of customers—she had always plenty to do, and they did not keep a barmaid—so Edward strolled out. He wandered vaguely down the town, and dropped in at the shop of the tailor, who was old and inclined to gossip.

“ Fine day, sir. Can I show you anything to-day in my line ? ”

“ Yes. I will look at some cloth and take some patterns ; my father spoke to me about some.”

“ Certainly. And is there nothing for yourself you would require as well, sir ? I have all sorts and kinds.”

“ Not at present. Is there any news stirring here ? We are very quiet at Stratton.”

“ None since you and your good father were so maltreated. I wonder Sir Lawrence didn’t read the Riot Act and have the villains transported.”

The tailor's legal knowledge was rather vague. Matthew and his assistants were supplied by a shop in Salisbury with clothes, and hence the great sympathy with his present customer. Edward laughed.

"Not so bad as that, Price." He was a cousin of the auctioneer's.

"Yes. And Elgood is so mean, he don't keep a boy to run with parcels in a respectable manner, as a tradesman ought, I think—don't you, sir?"

"That is indeed-a grave offence."

But the tailor, unconscious of the irony, went on—"Yes, they runs with their parcels theirselves. I see Farmer Bates, the miller's cousin, go down an hour ago, and then miss went with a parcel down the street—off to the farm, I suppose, for all she is so proud. She tried to get Mr. Clark, the vicar—as nice a man as ever lived. I always does for him, and he pays cash reg'lar and respectable."

"Well, and what was the end of it?"

"Don't know, sir, I'm sure. He's gone away, and Mrs. Parkhouse is gone too. No one knows exactly where she's gone to. She told Mr. Higgs, the clerk, that it was to see a brother. Mr. Clark

sent her off, I reckon, with a flea in her ear ; " and the tailor sniffed with wise suspicion.

Now, Price the tailor was by no means a bad man ; but he found life very dull, and with but little flavour of variety about it. He did not invent things, but he embellished. Under happier circumstances, he would have made a splendid special correspondent, whom any paper might have been proud of, and would have doubled its circulation in no time.

Edward, finding nothing more could be got at present, put his patterns in his coat pocket, and when he found them, in a week's time, he was puzzled to know how they got there. It is needless to add, the tailor got no order from the same. Now, Littledale branched at the end into two streets. He did not care to walk past Elgood's shop, so walked in a different direction, and in a lazy mood crossed the plank of the mill-dam and sauntered into the field beyond, thinking of many things. The course of his reflections ran pretty smoothly : " So Elgood got small sympathy from his neighbours, after all ? I wish dad was not so fast in his ideas ; he nearly lost the papers the other day with

Jones. But Jones doesn't seem to mind what a gentleman says. Why should he, when he's paid for it, and handsomely too? I don't think I ever saw Clark, at least not to know him—he's gone now, and I suppose I shan't. What was it about him and Clara?" and then he stopped. "She was a pretty girl; it was good fun talking to her. I dare say she thought it was herself I admired when I used to cross-examine her about her family history. How poor they must be! I wonder how far it went with her and the vicar? But no, he is a clergyman, and wouldn't do nowadays. I wonder if she is better looking, or coarse and red? I dare say she helps to make the shoes. If she does, she must smell of the leather; nearly all shoemakers I have met with do. It's a curious thing;" and he laughed out loud. "I'll go and meet her; it's only half a mile further on, and I've come half a mile. Perhaps she won't speak. I'll make her, though;" and he looked ahead. There was no one in sight. "I will turn back; one thing on one's hands is enough. You've missed a chance, miss, and will never know it, of talking to a gentleman." He came to a stile, and looked once more.

He saw a lady coming. “ Halloo ! who’s here ? ” He looked again, and saw it was Clara Maunder, picking flowers in the hedge as she came along.

The slight figure was filled out ; the step had more decision, and the eye more fire ; the clothes were of better quality, better made, and sat better. He was dimly conscious of all this in the distance ; but when she came to the stile, he caught a glance of the beautiful face that surprised him. Hebe had been transformed to Juno.

“ Good day, Miss Maunder,” said he, lifting his hat and taking another look. This time he saw what emboldened him ; she wore earrings. “ Too expensive for her to buy,” he thought ; “ it’s all right.”

Clara vouchsafed no answer, but tried to pass.

“ Those are pretty earrings you have on.”

She blushed scarlet. In the walk through the fields, as she was quite alone, she had mounted her “ war paint.” Finding he blocked up the stile, she said, “ I wish to pass.”

He only repeated, “ Those are pretty earrings.”

He saw he had touched a sore, but reckoned rather in error. Her spirit rose.

"I want to get over. If you don't let me, I shall go back."

"Certainly. Allow me to assist you."

"No, I shan't. Go away, I tell you; it is not like a gentleman to act as you do."

"But a gentleman can admire jewellery, even when a lady wears it."

"I dare say Miss Bunkum has better ones."

"What's Miss Bunkum to me?"

"A great deal, I should hope, as you are going to marry her, poor thing!" said Clara, with spiteful emphasis.

Edward saw his advantage, and said, "When we are deserted we get whom we can and try to forget, but it's hard work to kill memory."

"As you only look at the earrings, I shall take them off." Which she did, and replaced them in the case. "Some one else might see them," she thought.

"I can't see the setting now, but I can the jewel it adorned," said he, with another look of undisguised admiration.

"Which way are you going? because I shall go the other," said Clara, with determination.

"Very well; lead me as you will," said he, trying to take her hand.

"If you say anything more to me, I shall appeal to Farmer Bates when he comes up, and he will protect me. He doesn't rent under you," said Clara, with still undaunted courage.

"I will not force my company on you, Miss Mauder, though I don't see the worthy man coming you spoke of, and will write and apologize to Mr. Elgood for speaking to you, and explain to him I was only looking at your earrings," said Edward.

("The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.")

Clara turned white and said, "You will not be so wicked."

"Why not? A gentleman is never ashamed to apologize for a mistake."

"Matthew will not care to receive a letter from you after the other day."

"I did nothing; it was my father who made a mistake. It may have been from other motives than what you think, Clara;" and he looked meaningfully at her.

"And perhaps, if I were to write to Miss

Bunkum, she would not be so ready to look over the mistake."

" You can if you like. I spoke in jest just now about the lady. I have not seen her these six months ; and as for marrying her, I must be a fool to think of it."

" Why ? Are you too high and mighty ? " said Clara, tauntingly.

He lost his temper and committed an irretrievable mistake. " Because her father's only a baronet, and I shall be Earl of Chiveydale."

Clara turned scarlet. " Go and tell Matthew and all the world if you like about the earrings, and be as bad and false as you always were."

" If you think, Clara, that I meant what I said to apply to—— "

But she stopped him, and broke in again passionately. " Go ! I hate you. What are poor girls for but you gentlemen's good pleasure ? See, we are at the bridge over the mill-dam. I swear if you touch me I will throw myself in. If you have no respect for the living, fear the dead. The spirits of the murdered haunt the place of their death. My father was killed here ; ad-

vance a step, and I will call on his spirit to protect me."

She stood drawn to her full height, her beautiful face full of contending passions. She looked like a beautiful water spirit defying some despised enemy, as, with one hand slightly raised, she uttered the last words.

"I swear, Clara, you are deceiving yourself. Make your life as dreary as mine, if you will, but misjudge me not;" and he was gone.

She tottered into the mill, saying the day was hot. Bates, the miller, brought her a cup of water. She had not at the time realized Edward's last words, but as she got calmer they recurred to her mind. It is said that at the battle of the Nile a captain was struck in the head with a splinter; after the lapse of six months he was trepanned, and the first words he uttered were the completion of an order he had half delivered when on the deck of his vessel.

She went home in a dream of terror. Would he write? If so, what would she do? There was but one thing, and that was to see Maurice and give him back his presents. But then the thought

occurred to her that she could not deny having had them, and, after all, they were very beautiful. If she could only see Maurice! He could get her out of the difficulty, if any one could. Perhaps she would die; and then she thought of a beautiful marble tombstone in Littledale churchyard, and Maurice, Cyrus, and Edward St. John weeping over her untimely end. Then the difficulty seemed to go further off, and she was cross with every one and everything. Mothers tell us when children get cross they are on a fair way to recover from the ailment afflicting them, and what are men and women but "children of a larger growth"? Happy are those children who are punished while school is going on; some are kept in after school for punishment, while their companions are rejoicing in the love of a bright home and in the fields, glad with golden buttercups and carpeted like unto an emerald.





CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Maurice left Joshua Smith's office, laden with the documents, he bent his steps in the direction of the vicarage without loss of time. He had not very long to act in ; half-past three would soon be here, and his opportunity gone. In such a gossiping little place, the news would soon spread, and he would find himself powerless and the goal only half reached. So, gathering his wits together, he put a bold front on the matter, and asked to see Mr. Pod. Circumstances conspired to favour him to a certain extent. The last day for moving the court was fast approaching, and Silas wished, like an elephant, to test the force of the bridge that was to carry him over the stream before he put his forces on the march. One or two of the pontoons were rather leaky, to be sure, and here was

the chance of a fresh supply in question. So when Maurice sent in his name, Pod was delighted to see him. This time Maurice opened the ball without any fencing. He was a master in the art of dissimulation, and carried the citadel by a direct attack that would have required weeks of cautious mining, with the possibility of being countermined and "hoist with his own petard."

"Good day, Mr. Pod."

"Good day, Jones."

"I am come, sir, to say if you will give me the five hundred I will trust you for the rest. You have given your word, and that to me is quite sufficient. Besides, I have been thinking over matters, and after I left the other day you came no tricks, and didn't send any one up to the office to spy, as many would have done. I like to do with straightforward people."

"No doubt you do, my young friend. But although I feel from your manner you don't suspect me, things sometimes get wind. What will you do then?"

"Return Mr. Smith a week's salary and go. He can't touch me then."

“But you are paid by the year?”

“Yes; but I draw my salary every Saturday, and that makes it a weekly engagement.”

“But you can’t live on nothing?”

“I cannot; but I shall go to a distance, and apply to a gentleman named Mr. Silas Pod for a character,” said Maurice, with a smile.

“Suppose you and I quarrel?”

“If we do, it will make no difference. Mr. Pod will always speak or write the truth.”

“You have pretty good confidence in me.”

“If I hadn’t I shouldn’t be here.”

“And when am I to pay the money?”

“Now.”

“And how about the papers?”

“Show me the money.”

“For you to grab at?” said Mr. Pod, with a smile.

“No, to count.”

“Here it is,” said Pod, producing a bundle of notes.

“All right. You know the numbers and value; lock the door while I count.”

“What’s the good of that?”

"Before I could break it open you could arouse the house. Your word would be taken before mine, and Mr. Smith would turn his back on me, and in fact, help you, as I tried to deal on my own behalf."

Pod smiled and said, "Are they all right, Jones?"

"Yes, sir. You had better count them again."

Pod took them up and found the papers in the place of the notes. He stared, but said, in a jocular way, "I shall call Harker; he is in the kitchen doing a pipe, and take the money away."

"I watched him in, sir, and want you to send him with me as a surety to my character in your eyes."

Pod thought Maurice was gone mad, and looked his thoughts.

"Sit down, sir, a minute. You can sit by the fire and hold the poker if you like," said Jones with a touch of irony, and continued: "This morning, sir, Mr. Edward St. John called at the office, and Mr. Smith made an appointment for me to go at half-past three——"

"Go on, go on," said Pod, quickly. He was

not looking at the paper now, but at Maurice, with steadfast gaze, as if to read his soul.

“And search the registers. I came for the keys, and thought, coming along, ‘Mr. Pod will suspect me in the matter.’”

“And you thought you would not get the money?” said Pod, bitterly.

“No, I didn’t; but I want Harker to go with me.”

“In what character? As your little brother?”

“No; to see fair play. I will take him to the church first, lock him in, and then call for Mr. Edward and Higgs.”

“What for?”

“To overlook and see. Registers get altered sometimes,” said Maurice with emphasis.

“It’s transportation,” said Pod, drily. He was not quite satisfied, so Maurice played his trump card.

“Mr. St. John’s and Higgs’s word, maybe, would go against mine, and you might think I had sold a list to the other side. Take the money back till I and Harker come back with the keys. I wanted to be a lawyer; I’m only a clerk, and that

money was to buy the stamps. I had read lawyers sometimes rose to be great men, but I tried a crooked way, and it's come home to me."

Here Maurice turned to the window and passed his hand across his eyes; it is needless to observe they were quite dry, but the idea was equally good. Pod was vanquished. He jumped up and shook the deceiver by the hand (*who, en passant*, had never put the notes again on the table after he had once taken them up), and declared he trusted him entirely, and that all doubts were removed for ever from his mind.

"If so, sir, perhaps you will give me a crust of bread and cheese. I shall not have time for dinner."

Pod was about to ring; but Maurice stopped him, and said he must eat as he went along.

Jonathan Harker, in his varied experiences of life and manners, had seen strange changes of demeanour; but when Silas rushed downstairs, snatched up a piece of bread and cut another of cheese, and desired him to follow him, he did so wondering. But the climax was reached when he saw Silas feed the enemy and humbly receive in-

structions about his (Harker's) movements. He was silent; he felt "he could not do justice to the occasion" by any string of "flowers of rhetoric."

"You see, Jonathan had better go on first and wait in the churchyard. I will be down and let him in, and lock the door. Now, the organ loft looks over the body of the church; he can hide behind the curtain. If I want him, I will whistle sharp and quick. He will be near enough to hear and see. But they may take the registers for reference into the vestry; I shall not lose sight of them."

"Best bring the registers out on a table; it is lighter in the church."

"Very well, sir. Jonathan can get the table while I leave him. Doesn't do to cut the thing too fine;" and they departed.

Pod soliquized, when he saw them go—"I am sorry I mistrusted that lad; he has a noble ambition. If this only goes right, I'll put him forward in the world. It's rather a black case, his turning on Smith; but perhaps Smith has used him badly. We should forget and forgive, but it is very hard. I can forgive, but I can't forget;" and Silas relapsed into a brown study.

Maurice and Harker wended their way for a short time together, and then separated to meet at the church door, which they did unobserved. Harker was duly shut in. His confederate walked away, and thought quickly over his position and prospects. "I'm going too fast, I know; luck will turn some day, and I shall be blown on. Never mind; if I can see Clara off first or with me, I don't care. They can't prove the forgeries of the papers, because all the people are dead and buried that wrote them. Besides, once in London, catch who can. I have a lot of horses to drive, but I am most afraid of Matthew. I always feel a bigger scamp when he is near than at other times. Somehow, I don't doubt goodness as some people do, but I can't afford to be good, which accounts for poor people being wicked; at least, I have always heard them called so by the rich and well-to-do, Joshua especially."

The Feathers were reached by this time, and he found Edward St. John fuming.

"The dinner was beastly—not fit for a toad to be starved on," he remarked; and Maurice saw there was certainly very little eaten, and that his

manner was quite different from the morning. Feigning to take no notice, he said—

“ You will remember, sir, not to make any remark before Higgs of our deal.”

“ What are you afraid of ? ”

“ That, if it were known, any missing entry would be viewed with great suspicion. If it were not, the evidence of the papers would carry you through triumphantly.”

Edward sulkily acquiesced, and they went together to Higgs’s house, who of course was not at home. He was soon fetched, however, and the three went into the church. Maurice shot the lock back once or twice with a loud noise, to give Harker notice if he was anywhere in sight. But Harker was not, and the three moved up the aisle in comparative silence. A table was brought from the vestry by Maurice’s suggestion. Edward’s memory was wonderful ; he remembered every date of a birth, marriage, or death with unerring certainty. The entries were all copied and attested by Higgs ; a list taken in pencil by Maurice for Joshua’s guidance, so he said ; and Edward departed, in so very speedy a manner that it

aroused the lynx-eyed vigilance of Maurice. Higgs said he would shut up the church and keep the keys, in the vicar's absence. Maurice retorted he had borrowed them, and that if he (Higgs) wanted he could go and fetch them. Higgs went off in a huff.

This was just what Maurice wanted. He went back and let out Harker, who was very near the church door when he opened it, and followed Edward with cautious steps. There was a subdued sullenness about Edward St. John that Maurice, not possessing the key to the riddle in the knowledge of the morning's interview, was much puzzled to account for. He saw Edward stop at the only jeweller's shop in Littledale, and look in the window. He soon stepped in. Maurice cautiously followed and saw him come out. It flashed across the mind of the spy that Edward had been considered quite attentive enough to Clara, and his jealousy was aroused; but Edward turned into the Feathers. Maurice laughed to himself: "I didn't think Sarah Jane Tyack so hard to be bought. He must have queer taste." But then another puzzle presented itself: the servant of

all work was despatched down to the draper's. Maurice had no difficulty here; he waylaid the messenger and found out it was for a pair of green gloves of a particular shade. This puzzled him again, but he determined to watch; which he did, and saw Edward St. John ride away very quickly in the direction of Stratton.

But Edward had not been long on the road when the canter increased to a gallop; he turned out of the high-road and went across hedges and ditches. The poor animal, with quivering flanks, could scarcely leap each succeeding obstacle; at the next high hedge he rolled over. Edward was a good horseman and saved himself. As he got his horse on its feet again, the conviction came over him that he had been a fool, and he looked round to see that no one had been a witness of the wild ride and subsequent "spill." He then very carefully opened the gate of the field, and led the poor beast home, but in his breast the fury raged more fiercely than ever. The lava of passion was apparently cool on the top, but beneath it was at white heat; for when he recollect ed Clara in her beauty and her defiance of his power, he twisted as if struck by

a stick. Strange to say, what galled him most was, not that he had let such beauty escape him, but the thought that some one else had stepped in before him.

Women are often reproached with coquetry, and with reason. It is very true, in the realms of reason, that a woman admired by many may get too fond of flattery to settle down as a good wife; but men do not reason where their passions are concerned. It may be that one passion after another comes to the front, and they call it reason, but reason has nothing to do with it. A man admires a girl, it may be, and does not propose; he flatters himself he has reasoned himself out of it, when, in fact, ambition has got the upper hand. He wishes to win a more highly connected bride, or he fears the expense of a family may diminish some of his pleasures, which is the victory of selfishness. Or he thinks he will devote a few more years to save money in, and avarice is in the ascendant. Or he does not consider her sufficiently careful in her conduct; she encourages other men too much: it is his conceit that is wounded now. These everyday cases are put down by the man as

the result of reasoning, which is no more the case than that the needle points to the Pole because the mariner has reasoned the north to be the most useful point to steer by. It is the result of quite another law of nature. It was said by the great Charles Fox that he never knew a man whose political ideas had been calmly thought out undisturbed. Passion, family connections, the desire of notoriety, pique, and fifty other causes, are the powers that turn the scale; but each one flatters himself that, although he sees it to be the case in others, it is not so with himself, and would be indignant if told that it was.

So Edward St. John desired possession of Clara because his passions were aroused, and were more powerful in that direction. She had taken gifts from some one else unknown to those at home; she had been his father's servant, and, with a fine trait of feudal ideas, therefore lawful prey; and, more than all, his animal appetite was aroused. He had lately been living a more regular and decorous life, and the animal part of his nature clamoured loudly. The desire of alcohol is most fierce in a man or woman that has been but a short time an

abstainer, and ten times more difficult to combat than when the first resolution of abstinence was taken.

Maurice Jones owed the comparative success^o of his suit to reasons almost as complex. In the first instance, he thought it was a good speculation ; but her beauty had so wrought on him that when he made his fine and rather exaggerated speeches, he could not have told, even to himself, how much was real and how much false. Even a sovereign needs a certain amount of alloy to make it pass current. Made of pure gold, it would be too soft for every-day use ; it would soon get bent, and only fit to be re-melted and re-cast.

Cyrus had failed as yet. He had thought that all chance was over for him in the race, and hid his wounds in solitude and silence. Time would, he thought, heal them, but the scar would remain. Fouqué has told, in “Minstrel Love,” one of the most beautiful of his tales, the pure love of a good knight for his master’s wife, and his sacrifices and trials for her sweet sake. Cyrus’s love was of this sort ; it was like the clear water that issued from the hillside, so white, so good, so pure, but it lacks

the fiery spirit of even the weakest juice of the grape. Now, a lover to succeed must, like the sun, pour beams of heat as well as light ; but Cyrus was like the moon, that only sheds a clear and beautiful ray on a dark and silent earth, surrounded by the bright stars of grace and virtue.





CHAPTER IX.

MATTHEW certainly did not get stronger, but sat in the parlour a good deal, and attended to the book-keeping, leaving James and Robert to attend more and more to the shop. He was rather morbidly sensitive. He had been through Littledale streets in custody, and “the iron entered his soul.” His neighbours, those whose countenance he cared about, had one and all come in to offer congratulation on his recovery and discharge; but still there was at the bottom of his mind a lurking doubt that he could not unravel. It had not assumed any definite shape. A man more given to mix with his fellows would have shaken it off in the society of his friends. He had no friends, but plenty of acquaintance, and this must always be, to a certain extent, the result of either genius or unselfish

abstraction. The soil of genius is too deep to be probed. Abstraction digs a hole that lies in shadow when the sun is either rising or setting, and is only illumined when the life-long purpose is accomplished, and as soon as the achievement is over sinks back into the usual shadow and solitude. Matthew was very popular when he had adopted the orphans; but the wheel of life is always turning, and he had calmly pursued his way in silence and hope. Another reason was the loss of the all-important papers that had dimmed, as he thought, for ever the chance of the return of the children of his beloved Eunice to their ancestral honours. He abated not one jot of humble endeavour in the ordinary path of life, but the romance was dying out, and becoming more dim. He was getting on in years; he had toiled long and patiently. Longfellow has compressed a great deal of truth in the line—

“Weary with the march of life;”

but it falls short of describing the great hope that cheers the path of all patient and pure hearts, the hope of a more glorious dawn when the earthly

sun has set. A little grain of sand may irritate, inflame, or perchance destroy the eye that with unclouded vision has explored the regions of immensity and weighed each planet in the balance. Matthew found a new world was growing up with a new generation. The customs and usages of even his trade were altered. Time was when he took pleasure in the fit and shape of each boot or shoe as it grew under his hands, but now they were ordered by the gross, and sold, like pounds of sugar, to the first customer. It may cause a smile that so small a thing could influence a life so filled with noble purpose; but the coral insect bridles the raging tempest and curbs its force more surely than the best constructed breakwater. He was not unhappy or peevish, as many professing to have finer feeling are. He did not deem it his duty to make others miserable because he felt lonely, but sat in his little parlour calmly turning over the leaves of the ledger. Robert came in, and cheerfully remarked—

“We have not yet heard anything more from Jones, Matthew.”

“No, we have not. I mistrust that young man, I can’t tell why.”

"Well, I met him yesterday. He did not seem to avoid me."

"Did he say anything?"

"Yes; he asked for you, and said the reason was that before he has anything more certain to tell he thought it needless to raise hopes that might prove illusory and end in disappointment."

"If that were true, why did he begin?"

"I suppose to find out if you had anything in the shape of memoranda to help him."

Matthew's brow clouded as he remarked, "If those papers had not been stolen!"

"Yes, that is a drawback, certainly. But you must recollect one thing—Jones had not made any mention or hinted at reward till you had achieved something; if he does nothing, he has shown a desire to help, at any rate."

"Yes, Robert, he has; but I should not think of it if I were you. It may unsettle your ideas."

"That it has not. I do not think you have perceived that either I or James have become less industrious?"

"No, I have not in the slightest degree."

"I forgot to tell you Mr. Pod looked in and

said that Mr. Clark would at any time be happy to hear from you, and if you would trust him with the letter, he could enclose it at any time, as he was in constant correspondence with him."

"I will think it over, Robert. I hear some one outside;" and Robert went out.

Matthew looked round and saw Clara's work-basket at the other end of the table. He sighed: the work had not progressed lately as it was wont. Clara had not been idle, as a general rule, and it set him thinking. "I'm getting old," he thought, "and perhaps the ways of other things besides shoes are altered since I was young. Since the vicar went, Clara has not been the same girl. Somehow I don't feel so near to her as I did once. Did Mr. Clark really love her, and have I driven him away?" and he was filled with self-reproach and confusion. "I remember how shy I used to feel when I saw Eunice, and tried to do right; but perhaps I was conceited and vain of my own importance. There are others to be thought of. Shall I ask her? No, that wouldn't do. I had better write. Pod is a friend of his. But I can't ask the question; it would look like presumption." So

Matthew drew a sheet of paper to him, but was puzzled how to begin. He was not a ready writer, and his ideas were rather confused. At length, however, he finished a letter he thought would do:—

“Littledale.

“REV. SIR,

“Mr. Pod has kindly offered to forward a letter, so I presume you would like to hear the news, and would not be displeased at my addressing you. Things are much the same as usual here. Mr. Edward St. John called at Lawyer Smith’s the other day; at least, he came over and went to the church. As he does not come often, it made people remark it. Mr. Tubbs, the grocer, has added a new window to his shop; it is a bow one. We are all well, and some of us much the same as when you left us—some of us not so bright. I feel myself not so young as once I was, but hope to get no worse.

“Hoping you are well and enjoying the change,

“I remain,

“Your very humble servant,

“MATTHEW ELGOOD.”

"P.S.—I find on looking over my stock and books that it is a long time since I had the pleasure of serving you. If you would not think it a liberty, I should like to send you a pair of boots as a small remembrance of here and your kindness to myself. If you do I shall think you feel the same to me as you once did, although you have not given me reason to think otherwise."

Matthew folded it up, and directed it as far as the name, but a difficulty suggested itself—he did not know the rest of the address; and as he did not know Mr. Smithson, he thought of Pod, and determined to go and ask him. But the offer to forward anything prevented him; so, after turning the matter over, he thought he would send and ask him. He went upstairs and found Clara in her bedroom, and having knocked, asked her to come down, as he wanted her to go out for him. This was exactly what Clara desired, so she soon descended and received her instructions, and tripped off up the street.

She was so eager to see Maurice that she almost determined to call at Joshua's office, but was afraid

he might not be in, and so passed on to the vicarage, but found Silas out. He and Harker were, it so happened, at the church also, verifying the documents by the papers he had that morning received. A letter from the Cedars containing Mary's suggestion had quickened his ideas; so, without loss of time, he repaired to Littledale Church, and found the marriage of Isadore Percy St. John regularly entered. It was in the centre of a page, and the paper showed no signs of erasure and bore the water-mark 1686. It was all straightforward, there was no disputing. It ran—

“Marriage celebrated between Isadore Percy St. John, aged 28, bachelor, son of, etc., and Arabella Cuthbert Bunkum, daughter of Sir Lawrence Bunkum, Bart., aged 27, of etc.

“June 15, 1689.”

“I don't think there is much to be done here,” he whispered to Harker, as Higgs was putting the registers back.

Harker shook his head slowly and sadly, just as a knock came at the door. It was a rather timid one

Clara had followed them, directed thence from the vicarage. Silas in his heart hoped a ray of light might by chance be thrown on the matter. But no; she only came for the direction, which Pod finished and returned the letter for Clara to post, having obtained which she departed.

While this was being done, Harker looked round the church, and finding nothing very particular to interest him in the memorial tablets, he examined the pulpit. It bore an inscription, in Latin of course, “that it was the gift of Mr. Isadore St. John to the church and congregation of Littledale,” which was deciphered by Pod’s assistance, not very willingly given, who very impatiently urged their immediate departure to Stratton Church, which was accordingly done in a trap hired at the Feathers. Having snatched a hasty dinner at the inn at Stratton, they proceeded to the church and found the documents right in every respect. The same absence of design, the colour of the ink, the condition of the books, all testified to their genuine character. Quite disheartened, Silas Pod bent his way back, as Jonathan at a subsequent period expressed it, “with his tail between his legs, quite beat like.”

When Silas got back, having taken the precaution to have fresh certificates made out in each place by the respective clerks, he dismissed Harker for the night. He then drew a sheet of paper towards him. Again he went over the pedigree of the Stratton St. Johns. It was not quite straight and clear. "Always believed Henry's father thought that Isadore Percy died in the west. So he did, but left issue, as the registers prove. His son was born rather quickly, but that proves nothing. I'll run up to London to-morrow, and leave Harker on guard, though what good that will do I don't know, except I'll take the opinion of counsel on the matter." So thinking, he supped and went to bed.

Joshua Smith's office was in a state of turmoil the same day. Maurice had dinner in the house to save time; there were several deeds to copy and compare. Joshua had seen the pedigree, and was in a fever lest the chance should escape him of the good job to be made of the coming trial. Even Harold was sternly kept to work. Gabriel St. John had judged rightly: the borrowing a portion of the sinews of war from Joshua enlisted

him heart and soul. There was no mistake about the matter, and he was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet.

Clara had looked in all the shop windows as long as she dared without attracting observation, and then, as if having forgotten something, had quickly walked up the town on the side of the street Smith's offices lay. Maurice, happening to look out into the street, saw her. In an instant he divined she wished to see him, and so went to her immediately.

“Oh, Maurice, I want to speak to you!”

“Yes, my love, but not here.”

“I must indeed. Things have happened——”

“What things? Quick, tell me!”

“I can’t; I’m frightened.”

“Meet me in the lane, as you did before.”

“Oh, I can’t; the risk is too great. Besides, it isn’t right, Maurice.”

“Mr. Smith will be out in a minute, and then you will have to go.”

Clara trembled at this contingency which she had not reckoned on.

“I shall go to Sally’s,” she said feebly.

"It won't do to-day. I can't get away, we are so busy."

At that instant he saw the letter. It aroused all the worst part of his nature.

"Be at Sally's at five o'clock and I will come," said he, quietly taking the letter from her hand.

She turned to go, but said, in a frightened tone, "I've lost the letter, Maurice. Where is it?"

"Nonsense! You posted it; you told me so."

"I didn't."

"'Twas for Mr. Clark. I couldn't have known if you hadn't told me."

Clara turned and was gone, only half convinced, but in her state of fright and excitement she hoped for the best, remembering she had passed the office twice since it was directed, and went home. The suspense had increased since she had been looking to see Maurice. She had not been able to get out before, and she had been too excited to think of an excuse, and could not, like Maurice, coin a lie with facility and ease.

When Maurice went back, he said he had a headache, but continued working with great diligence and despatch. Nevertheless, when his dinner

was sent him, he only ate a portion, still keeping up the idea of illness ; but at four o'clock he announced that he could work no longer, and went into Joshua's inner office.

"If you please, sir, I want to go out."

"You can't. There is a lot to be done."

"I have a bad headache. I've worked all day, and will come back in an hour and work as long as you like ; but I missed my run at dinner time, and it has made my head worse."

"Well, go then ; but be back punctually, mind," said Joshua, very sulkily. He looked on all work-people as machines, and was angry when the gear worked stiffly at busy times.

Maurice needed no second bidding, but was gone like the wind. He first went to his lodgings. He was in a whirl of excitement. "She means to give me up for that — parson," he thought. He was about to cut open the envelope, when his hand faltered. There are actions the worst men hesitate at. If it had been Clara's writing, he would have opened it at once. He looked at the envelope ; there was the name in a writing he had seen before. He tried to collect his thoughts ; but

no—yes, he remembered Matthew's peculiar scrawling hand of old; and as for the rest—whose was that? And then the evil spirit arose, and he opened it. He read it through very carefully, and pondered. Time pressed, but no—he must make up his mind. It was evidently a plan of Matthew's to open communication; and then he thought he had always disliked him—at least lately. He looked at his watch and found he must be off; so, determining to be guided by circumstances, he put the letter in a freshly directed envelope in his pocket, and went to the appointed trysting-place.





CHAPTER X.

MAURICE took a short cut across fields and hedges, but notwithstanding the rapid movement of his body, his thoughts moved quicker still, and he decided the first thing was to ascertain about the letter. He came to Sally's hut, and found her, as usual, in the chimney corner, and Clara seated on a chair looking anxious and worried.

“Good day, Sally. Almost well?”

“Gitting better, thanks to Mr. Elgood and Miss Maunder. They care for the old and sick when ill and bad.”

“So do I. Here is a shilling for you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Jones. It'll help pay the rent;” and Sally deposited it in an old teapot.

“Miss Maunder, if you are going, I shall be happy to see you a little way down the lane.”

"Yes, I must be home soon," said Clara, absently, as they left the hut without further remark.

But Sally came to Maurice, and bringing her skinny face close to his, gave him a nudge, winked, and pointed at Clara. Maurice felt disgusted, but controlled himself. There are degrees of refinement even in vice, at all events at first.

"My dear Clara, what has happened? You are quite upset."

"Oh, Maurice, take back the thing you gave me, and you must not see me any more."

Maurice fancied he detected Matthew's handiwork, and was half beside himself with rage, but by an effort asked, in a comparatively calm manner, "Why, darling?"

"Because Mr. Edward St. John met me," sobbed Clara.

"And what then? Did he tell you not to speak to me?"

"Oh no; but I had the earrings on you gave me. It was in the field, and he wanted to speak to me, and I didn't want to."

"And what did he say?"

"That—that he would write to Matthew and tell him I was walking about with earrings on; and I get frightened whenever the post comes. It—it seems so dreadful. Matthew would be so angry, and James and Robert would too. I wish I was dead—I do, I do!"

"Well, but he hasn't written, dear?"

"No, but he may; and when I see him, he'll speak to me again and make me walk with him, and then those at home will hear of it, and they will be unkind. I wish I had never seen the earrings or the ring, or only in the shop windows. Take them back, do, Maurice, and then I can say I haven't got them;" and the sobbing was renewed with tenfold vehemence.

"Don't cry, pet," said Maurice. He felt a degree of hate to Edward St. John too deep for expression, and determined to be even with him yet if he could. But Clara still sobbed, till Maurice was apprehensive of hysterics, and said, "What can I do?"

"Oh, go away from Littledale for ever, and I can be unhappy; but they can't be so unkind to me at home then, when they find it out."

"Look here, Clara, my love to you has made me clever."

"Well?" and the sobbing was not so loud.

"And I know Mr. St. John never intended to write. He took you for a fool."

"How do you know?"

"Very well. He has other things to do just now."

"How do you know?"

"I know all about a great lawsuit. He will be Earl of Chiveydale very likely."

"He told me so."

"Why?"

"Because I asked him, as he was rude, how Miss Bunkum would like to hear of it."

"And he said——"

"He wasn't going to marry her at all."

"Very likely he did. I told it to you as a great secret that was not to be repeated."

"You are unkind now. I shouldn't have said anything, only he made me angry."

"And you made him angry, and that is why he threatened to write to Matthew," said Maurice, who saw his way more clearly.

"But he said I was going to make his life wretched, and when people are wretched they don't care what they do."

"That was all his way. He has ruined lots of girls in his time. I don't like to tell all the particulars, but I know a lot of things that we have to manage of the same sort at the office, and some people have to leave a neighbourhood for a time for the same thing," he skilfully suggested.

"That's a lie."

Maurice reddened. He saw he had made a false move.

"What is?"

"What you said. Mr. Clark didn't go away for that; it was because he loved me, and I wouldn't have him."

"I never said Mr. Clark did."

"But you meant it."

"I didn't mean anything of the sort. I was thinking of some one else."

"Who?"

"I shan't say."

"Why?"

"Because you told Mr. St. John what I told you about Miss Bunkum."

Clara was silent, and Maurice continued, "Very well, if you hate me, I will go away. I'm going to London ; I wanted you to come too."

"What for ? "

"To be married directly we get there ; and when once the ring is on that dear finger, no more sorrow for Edward St. John or any one else. You will be a wife, to be admired still, but at a distance, and no more fear of what will be said at home or elsewhere."

"But we couldn't be married when we get there ? "

"Yes, we could. I would go for a fortnight first."

"Well ? "

"And then come back and fetch you away, dearest. I hope to make you my wife, because I want to see you happy and in your right sphere in society. What are the people here ? A lot of bumpkins."

"All, Maurice ? "

"With one exception, and she is an angel."

But the angel pouted and didn't mean to be had so easily.

"Come, darling, there is a spring in the field ; I will go and damp my handkerchief, and you can wipe your eyes. They look red, and Matthew may ask questions."

"It doesn't follow he will get an answer, though," said Clara, smiling.

"Oh, then I will cure them another way ;" and he kissed the tear-stained face that looked brighter and prettier, if possible, for the marks of sorrow that had almost passed away, but still left a trace behind. "My love, you remember the letter you were going to post to-day ?"

"Yes. What of that ? Have you found it ?"

"No ; but what was it about ?"

"Oh, Matthew wrote to Mr. Clark. He sent a message by Mr. Pod, through Robert, that he would like to hear from him."

"That all ?"

"Yes. Why are you so curious ?"

"Because Mr. Clark is not fond of writing letters. When does he expect an answer ?"

"Oh, very quickly. He will be disappointed if it doesn't come."

Maurice walked in silence a few steps. It had the desired effect. Clara said—

“ You had better go now.”

“ Well, if you tell me I will ; ” and with another stolen kiss, he was over a gate and gone.

Clara walked slowly home. She felt dissatisfied with herself, the world, and Maurice. One thing was, she had missed her tea. Even the gods drank nectar ; how hardly, then, the loss of an accustomed cup of tea must affect us poor inferior mortals !

Maurice went back to the office. He declared he felt much better, and could finish any amount of work. His mind was more at ease. He had forbore to make any very lover-like speeches ; he reserved these for the next interview. He had pacified Clara for the present, and that was enough. Added to Clara’s beauty, Maurice felt a fierce pang of jealousy of Edward St. John, not for the present, but for the future. He almost determined to throw himself on the side of Pod ; but two reflections prevented him—the one that Silas was the friend of Cyrus and would certainly not assist his suit, and the other that in a neutral position he thought he would ultimately be a greater gainer. The taste of money had provoked a desire for more ; the appetite increased with the food it fed on. It was

not all avarice ; he desired to deck Clara in silks and jewels. The one soft spot in his heart was the love for the woman of his choice ; it extinguished at times all others. Even while he panted for more money, the thought of his heart was to throw it at her feet in solemn and profound worship. It is a mistake to think bad men cannot love. They may at first be attracted by other means, and have other views ; but the flame once kindled burns fiercely, the very heat often shrivelling meaner things into blackened and despised cinders.

The lights were lit and the work proceeded at Joshua's ; there was no slackening of either of the three. Joshua looked at intervals over the chain of legal evidence. It was complete with the exception of one horrid gap, and that was the death of Charles James ; but as he fancied the other side would be equally careful to either prove it or not press the matter, he dismissed it. Besides, of the money he was colourably to advance, he was to receive at least the greater part back as fees in one way or another ; so he thought failure would not be such an utter one, as he could still, on one suit or another, extract a good deal out of the St. Johns

even after the loss. We each cherish dreams, and he hoped by the success of his projects to buy or get into his hands the Stratton lands. It was not likely that the Earls of Chiveydale would care much for them; and with those added to the Grange property, he might see his son a county man and received in that exclusive circle that in the country excludes even professional men. Things had gone well with Joshua, and he likened the future to an improved copy of the past. There was an ugly blot, to be sure, in the title of the Grange, but no one else knew it except himself. He did not want to sell, and there were lots of titles equally good to hold, but hardly good enough to sell at a satisfactory price. He had given less than the value, but there was no one to question the fact, and he felt a thrill of exultation at it. By ten o'clock the tasks were far enough completed to satisfy him, and he dismissed Maurice as he and Harold retired to the other part of the building.



CHAPTER XI.

SILAS POD had written to Henry St. John Thompson a rather caustic letter about the supposed discovery. It ran :—

“ Littledale.

“ DEAR HENRY,

“ I have searched the registers, and find that your supposition was as wrong as your father’s. He thought Isadore Percy died in the west. So he did, but left issue ; and if you are desirous of seeing the register of the marriage and birth of the first-born, you can. With regard to your idea of his running off with some one else’s wife, I dare say he did, but evidently got lawful issue first. My idea is that the queer compound your father unearthed was simply a fanatical rhodomontade of Parson Paul Sterling, who no doubt was half a nonjuror and

very little of a conjuror. I am off to London to see Starks, Q.C. Tell Starks to write *urgently*.

“ Yours truly,

“ SILAS POD.”

Before he went he called Harker into the library, and said, “I don’t tell you to be cautious, because there is no need.”

“ Thank you, sir. About Jones ? ”

“ Trust him ; but if you make any discoveries telegraph to the Cedars.”

“ What, the news ? ”

“ Not exactly. ‘ S.P.W.D.’ ”

“ Standing for—— ”

“ ‘ Silas Pod wanted directly.’ I have written to that effect—no, but in fact I will.” So saying, he opened the letter and added a postscript. “ You will not be likely to hear much here, Harker, so to-morrow enjoy your holiday with discretion.”

Harker nodded and withdrew.

Pod left the next morning, but arrived safely in London. On his arrival, he put up at his usual hotel, and went in search, bundle in hand, of Oswald Starks, Q.C. Now, Oswald Starks’s career

had not always been on roses ; it was uphill at first, and many a help on the journey had his cousin Jabez, the Chiveydale steward's managing clerk, given him. Oswald always remembered the obligation, like the good fellow that he was. So when the letter reached him, he received Silas with open arms. Moreover, he knew Silas slightly before, so the way was completely smoothed.

“ I shall take these papers home, Mr. Pod.”

“ Shall you ? That is kind ; I know you don't usually.”

“ Yes, but this is a special case ; and if I can give you hope, retain the Solicitor-General at once.”

“ It is poor comfort.”

“ So it may be, but more remains behind. Come with me, and I shall often be glad to refer to you.”

The two men went off to the mansion of Starks, and dined temperately but generously. The dinner was cleared, and the papers, or rather the abstracts, spread out. After three hours' close attention and numerous questions, Oswald said—

“ I will write an opinion, but I must ask two or three questions. Firstly,—Have you gone over all

the letters of the deceased earl's from the year 1687 inclusive; and if so, what communications have passed between them and the Stratton St. Johns? Secondly,—I shrewdly suspect that fellow Jones, who sold you the papers. What do you know of him? Thirdly,—The very strength of your case is sapped by the non-production of the authenticated death of Charles James's second son. Until you have that, your case is weak; if you have it, your case is strong.”

“How so? I don't see any flaw in the genealogy of the third son, Isadore Henry.”

“Answer my questions, Pod, and then I will explain afterwards.”

“Firstly,—I have searched as well as others?”

“Were they experts?”

“They were lawyers.”

“That will do.”

“Secondly,—Jones I know nothing of, except that he has been with Joshua Smith for years, and is much trusted by him.”

“Of course. What are his relations?”

“Hasn't got any.”

“If they were bad, he has been put up by the

other side; as he has none, will probably sell to those that pay highest. He has missed the healthy tone of a home, and a lawyer's office has finished him, poor fellow; but he must be very clever. Why, don't you see, he came to you for half his pay because he feared to lose all."

"What a rascal!"

"On consideration, I don't think he was put up by the other side. The hurry to get what he could shows that he was fighting for his own hand."

"Thirdly,—The account of the death is in the earl's letter."

"It is worth nothing. Dead men come to life sometimes when they're not wanted. To get up evidence to the contrary at this distance of time, and throw doubt on your case, would be easy enough."

"But if they could, what then?"

"The very strength of the other side is a weakness. There must be flaws somewhere, because they have never corresponded with the head of the house."

"But many people don't."

"Not for long, I tell you. The chance, ever so

remote, of eight or nine thousand a year is quite sufficient, besides the hope of present subsidies or other help."

"How do you know?"

"Because every time my name is mentioned in a case I get a host of letters from relations I never saw or heard of before."

"We are all right else?"

"Yes, yes; but a chain is no stronger than the weakest place, recollect once for all."

"Well, what is next?"

"Write down to Littledale and get Jones up here, also get a letter from Harker of the whereabouts of his friend who tracked Green."

"I have the detective's address in my pocket-book."

"Get it out, then, and give it to me, and we will see him at twelve sharp to-morrow."

Pod produced the address, which Starks, Q.C., took care of, remarking, "Besides, if you look carefully, you will see two or three gaps in the genealogy. The marriage of one, at least, is wanting, and the certificate of the birth of another—see," and Starks pointed to the line of descent, and put his finger

on what he considered the gaps, and which had been produced by Jones suppressing the various papers. Starks imagined the gaps were produced by non-existence.

The conversation strayed into other channels. A cab was called, and Pod went to his hotel.

Next day, at twelve o'clock, the detective was announced. Starks, who was always trying to cross-examine some one, took him in hand.

“ You watched Green ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Does he drink ? ”

“ Not much ; only a glass at lunch and—— ”

“ How does he spend his term ? ”

“ Dressing fine.”

“ That will do. Good day.”

After the detective had retired, Starks continued, “ You haven't got much time ; you must move in a week, or it will be too late this term.”

“ But about Jones ? I can't get him to London.”

“ Then I will. Young men all like London life.”

“ It will be a delicate operation.”

“ I will hand Green over to a friend of mine.

Don't fear him, though he is rather a slippery fish.
But how about the sinews of war?"

"All right."

"No, it isn't. Tell St. John Thompson to realize everything he has got into ready cash; there may be occasions when delays are dangerous."

"I will, and go down to him to-day. He waits for a letter."

"Now good-bye."

Pod left London and went to the Cedars by the next train. He found Henry much as usual, and Mary pleasant as ever. Cyrus greeted him warmly. Pod had his dinner; they had waited for him. The things were removed and dessert placed on the table. Silas tried to work the conversation round to the point he had come for, but other topics interfered and it was no use. At length, as every one began to think of retiring, in desperation he plunged into the subject by saying, "Henry, you must realize everything you can."

Henry stared.

"You must, indeed; there may be occasion for it. A sum in hand often turns up trumps. At the worst you can but lose the interest."

"Are you really serious?"

"If I were your usual adviser, I should say you had better, but as a friend I say you must. I will put something to it as a loan, you know."

"No, you won't, Mr. Pod," broke in Mary, impulsively. "Together we can realize a very handsome sum. It will be, it must be, more than sufficient."

"My dear madam," said Pod, persuasively.

"I will. Everything I possess is too small for the occasion."

"It ought to be settled on you, in case of accidents; indeed it ought."

"No. I shall have my own way for once."

"Well, I tell you what, if to-morrow you are still determined, you can sell the securities held in your name, and at the end of a week we can buy Consols and settle it just the same."

"Very well; let that be settled at some future time."

Henry was more amused than moved. He had determined that it should be done, and thought the present time not the best for enforcing his ideas. He did not in consequence openly support Silas,

but waited for events to show themselves. Cyrus had been silent; they all thought he had not obtruded in the matter from delicacy. The discussion languished and had died away; other matters regarding the son and heir were proudly quoted by mamma, and graciously listened to by the guests. At length Silas yawned and said—

“Excuse me, I will retire if you will permit me, Mrs. Thompson.”

“I don’t know, you obstinate man.”

“I cry pardon and——”

A knock came at the door. It startled them all, and Mary turned white with apprehension. Henry went out of the room to see who the stranger was that so loudly knocked for admission at that hour of the night, for the time had slipped away, and it was late. The servant was heard undoing the fastenings, and the steps of Henry were inaudible, but a conversation in rather subdued tones whetted the curiosity of the listeners. The sound of a horse pawing the gravel outside was clearly discernible in the still night. Everything seems so much more to be dreaded in the darkness. The dislike of children to the darkness survives to a

much later period of life than is generally supposed or acknowledged. They all three, by a common impulse, moved towards the door.

"Perhaps it's robbers," said Mary.

"Robbers don't usually knock at the door to graciously give you warning of their approach, according to police reports," said Pod.

Henry's voice was now heard crying out, "Pod, come here."

They all went in various stages of excitement. A man stood on the doorstep, holding the bridle of a horse white with foam.

"Which is Mr. Pod?" he asked.

"That's my name. I was never ashamed of it yet, and don't mean to be now."

"Twenty-five shillings to pay."

"What for, my good man?" said Pod, as Henry produced his purse with alacrity.

"Telegraph from Salisbury, sent to the nearest station up all night, to Chiveydale Park."

"Come in, my good fellow, and give me the telegram. Your horse shall be put in the stable," said Henry.

"No, only to Mr. Pod."

Pod paid the money. He too had been puzzled, and was now excited. He tore it open.

“Jonathan Harker, Littledale, Salisbury.

To Silas Pod, The Cedars, Chiveydale Park.

“S.P.W.D.—Littledale Church in flames—suspected burglary—police in possession for the present—fire being got under.

“Nearest station that is open despatch by horseman—urgent.”

The man was taken to the kitchen and regaled with a substantial repast; his horse was fed in the stable. Silas, in a fever of excitement that contrasted very forcibly with his usual phlegmatic temperament, got a Bradshaw and studied it eagerly, running his fingers down the lines. At length he said—

“I must start in two hours, Henry. Get your man up, and let him harness a horse; the best and fastest train does not stop nearer than Colchester, twenty miles off.”

“I will go with you,” said Henry, eagerly.

“I will too,” said Cyrus.

"No, thank you; I must be on the spot alone. It would not do to give my arrival the appearance of a council of war. I quite appreciate your kindness all the same."

A cold joint was brought, and Pod made a hearty repast though he was excited. As he said he did not know when he should get any more, they made him up a bundle of sandwiches, and a flask of wine was added. All the preparations being completed, he once again impressed on Henry the importance of a ready sum of money. Henry promised compliance and acquiescence. Silas again urged the importance of despatch, and in five minutes was gone. The night had crept away in the preparations; the dawn was just beginning to look bright in the eastern sky, and the blackbird and thrush to enliven the semi-darkness. As the sun rose above the horizon and climbed in the heavens, it gave a bright and glad appearance to the scene, the golden clouds fleeting across the eastern sky in more than usual beauty. Pod looked out of the carriage window.

"It is the sun of Austerlitz," he said with enthusiasm.



CHAPTER XII.

AFTER Silas Pod's departure Littledale remained much the same. The deeds were completed, and Joshua had gone to Stratton to get some of them signed, taking Harold with him. This time he left Maurice on guard at the office, which left Maurice much more at liberty in their double absence. He interpreted dinner to mean a space of time commensurate to three courses and a dessert, and introduced a tea interval. He was in a great hurry to see Clara again, but could only watch, so resigned himself to the task of a little work. He looked out of the window several times, but saw nothing. Suddenly, as he was busy copying, a thought struck him: he would get Sally out of the way and secure a long *tête-à-tête*. To do him justice, the object he had in view was

to get her consent to hasty nuptials. On mature consideration he had not burnt the letter to Cyrus, but kept it, intending in case of emergency to post it and lay the blame of delay on the post-office. This he was the more able to do, as there had been in times gone by two or three little irregularities of no particular moment. On one occasion he had escaped detection when he had forgotten to post the office letters till the next morning. So, with a mind at ease in the matter, he proceeded to think of other things of more pressing importance. The lane that had witnessed so many of the moving incidents in Clara's life he thought a good deal too public, and he determined to bring the matter to a successful issue at once, if possible. With the natural impatience of the young, he determined to win or lose; he could never be in a better position, as he thought, with regard to Clara. He might be obliged to post the letter, and then Cyrus would return and his (Maurice's) chance become proportionately less. He could read between the lines of Matthew's letter, and had no doubt whom he would prefer for Clara's husband. Another cloud had arisen. The fact of Edward

St. John having seen and admired her was full of meaning. He had seen from the slight amount of intercourse between them that he was a man to carry out what he once began. Clara was young, and who could tell the result? It might be that, stung by a refusal, he would carry out his threat of writing to Matthew, which Maurice with justice saw to be the very greatest bar to his suit either *in esse* or *posse*.

So, telling the office boy to mind his work, and that he would shortly be back, he strolled down the town to make an observation. He was at first unsuccessful, and was about to retire, when he saw Jane Bright, the active maid of all work, sally forth for a small purchase. She walked briskly towards the greengrocer's, and while there Maurice as quickly went into the draper's and bought a handkerchief stated to be "hemmed ready for use." This, crumpled up and disarranged, but folded again, he presented to the handmaid, saying—

"Please give this to Miss Maunder; it is her property."

"I will, sir," said Jane, with a curtsy and smile. She half suspected the fact, but wondered

Maurice did not call. She had been out when he called before.

"I can't ask you to do so much for me for nothing, can I?"

"Oh yes, sir. I am always pleased to serve Miss Clara; she is so kind and good," added the handmaid, and departed.

Maurice mused: "If I have succeeded, well; if not, all is lost or nearly so." A female form came to the door, looked up and down the street, and nodded at the sky. Maurice could have thrown up his hat and cried out with joy, but he restrained himself.

Jane had delivered the handkerchief privately, and the blush that accompanied the receipt increased her suspicions; in fact, rendered them certainties in her own mind. Clara unfolded the handkerchief. In it there was a bit of paper, on which was written in pencil, "Sally's, three o'clock." Clara had not much relished the laconic style, but the reflection that it had been dictated by prudence brought a returning rush of regard for Maurice, in the midst of which she came downstairs, and answered by a nod.

Maurice went up the lane at a brisk walk, and was rather hot when he came to Sally's hut, so asked for a cup of water.

"Certainly, Mr. Jones; but in my young days gentlemen liked something stronger;" and Sally leered and laughed.

"Very well, then. How much is it a glass?"

"I durstn't sell it; I only gives it to my friends."

"Very well, give me a glass."

Sally went to a cupboard and touched a piece of board; it drew back and showed two black glass bottles, very dirty and unwholesome looking. Pouring a portion of the contents of one of them into a handle-less teacup, she handed it to her guest. He qualified it with water, and found it excellent spirit, if strength is a criterion of excellence. Maurice handed back the teacup; it contained a shilling. The joy expressed in Sally's face made it look even more disagreeable than usual. Emboldened by the draught, Maurice proceeded in as direct a fashion as he could.

"Do you ever go out, Sally?"

"Deary me, not often."

“ How do you get your extra strong water, then ? ”

“ I creeps out when I can, but ‘tain’t often, and then I gets mushrooms and sells them if I can.”

“ How many do you get usually ? ”

“ Sometimes none, sometimes two plates full.”

“ I’m very fond of mushrooms ; how much are they a plate ? ”

“ Shilling a plate.”

“ Indeed ! I often buy them for sixpence.”

“ So you may ; not the sort I gets, though.”

“ Ah ! no doubt they are very good. Get me some to-day.”

“ Lor’ bless the man ! they be got in the early morning afore the dew is gone.”

“ But I want some to-day, Sally. I will pay you to go and look.”

Sally’s eyes brightened, but assumed a cunning expression.

“ Dare say you want to come here while I am away and rob my teapot,” said the crone, in agony at the thought of his clutching her treasure-house.

“ Nonsense ! take it with you. Leave your house unlocked, and I’ll give you five shillings.”

He had overshot the mark.

“Ho! ho! he! he!” laughed and wheezed Sally.

“Will you or not?”

“Maybe yes, maybe no. I’ve a-done it before, though, and many a young woman has drunk to her lover here.”

The supply of food and luxuries had been curtailed of late, and Sally resented it. She entertained a peculiar idea of the scheme of creation, very common to the vicious idle, and consequently poor. It is not exactly what Mr. Darwin has put forward, and slightly different from the Mosaic account. To sum it briefly in a few words—that the Almighty created a race of good but rather easily imposed on creatures, who have continued till the present day, and they are the poor, especially if descended from pauper ancestors. Finding it not work as He expected, He created a race of proud but affluent beings for the express purpose of supporting the said interesting imbeciles. This proposition has never, to the belief of most students, been advanced. For the same reason, the Druids never instructed the people generally,

for fear of the diffusion, and consequently vulgarization, of their lofty ideas. The same reason holds the believers in this faith silent, except in hints. They hold it with tenacity and firmness, and resist any attempt to destroy it by the two engines alone capable of doing so, namely, work and knowledge; nor do they ever, except on protest, taste these dangerous fruits. They believe, and with justice, they would eventually be degraded to love them, and in time join the ranks of the inferior race created for their sustenance. Like the savages who deceive the white man with regard to their worship, these equally reticent worshippers only acknowledge their faith and creed by hints and intimations of the vaguest kind. Should any of their race manifest a desire for the forbidden fruits, he is looked on with the same feeling of contempt that a high caste Hindoo looks on a brother who has taken the wages of a rich, but low caste, native. But this interesting race is dying out. The fruit of knowledge is being forced into their unwilling mouths, and a despotic system, called "boarding out," separates their children from their instructions; and so pliable is the

infant mind, they have often forsaken the faith of their forefathers and joined the enemy. So a great fear is entertained, even among the most distinguished of them, that they will soon be among the things of the past—like the gentle Australian native, who, kills a sheep, tears out the kidney, and then runs away, leaving the carcase to rot.

Sally resented bitterly the failing supplies; and as the falling off was in an exact ratio to her recovery, she resented it more bitterly, as no complaint could be made of the matter. The world is so prejudiced to these exceedingly sensible and rational ideas, there really is great fear of their entirely dying out. “The poor shall never die out of the land,” but there may be a time when a generation of purer and nobler aspirations may behold the hideous demon of vice shorn of her bright wings, a creeping and hideous form, with disgust and abhorrence—those glittering wings that owe their beauty to the feathers torn from the beautiful plumage of a bright child of heaven, wounded by the arrow or caught in the snares of her father and husband. Perhaps, in “the good

time coming," she may be banished again to guard the dark portals, never again to be opened through a glad eternity, and only to be imagined by some future seer, who may perchance be blind to outward things, like him who sang his deathless song of man's first Fall.

Maurice shuddered at the hag's suggestion ; but "a woman despised" is the most dangerous animal. So he resumed—

"Never mind, Sally ; go and pick mushrooms, and have your five shillings."

"You said a sovereign, a bright golden pound, you know."

Maurice felt more humiliated than he ever had before, and half repented ; but there is no more dangerous state than half repentance. It is repentance half alive, and so easily smothered again for the present.

"Very well, a sovereign then. You make a hard bargain."

"No, I don't, dearie."

Maurice experienced a desire to kick. "You had better go at two o'clock," he said shortly.

"Very well. Sally's poor, and Sally must do as she's told."

"Or as she is paid, you mean."

Sally's eyes emitted a flash, but Maurice never saw it.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye. You hain't given me what you promised."

Maurice handed it over.

"Don't drink out of the cracked bottle yourself, dearie ; it sends people to sleep."

"Do they ever wake ?"

"Not if they take more than four glassfuls."

He turned and was gone.

The old crone mumbled to herself, "As she is paid, as she is paid. Yes, and she can pay out, too ; and so you'll find, young master. Why should I be poor, and you able to give a sovereign as you like ? But I got the sovereign ;" and she chuckled.

Two o'clock passed, and as half-past struck from the church tower, she moved the wretched bed. It was an old four-poster, with only two uprights left. As she drew it aside, a hole in the wall stood revealed, from which she extracted two or three odds and ends, and placed in it a chair to sit on. Finding it rather hard, she took the pil-

low to make her seat easier, re-arranged the wretched clothes on the bed, and poked a hole with her finger, through which she could see all that passed. She had scarcely completed her arrangements, when she heard footsteps approaching. Her countenance expanded into a grin of triumph as the door opened, and she pulled the bed back barely in time to escape detection.

When Jane Bright had laid the breakfast at Matthew Elgood's that morning, she withdrew into the kitchen. Matthew, James, and Robert had long since come down, and were in various parts of the premises. Clara had descended as well, and was putting a vase of wild flowers and grass on the table, when Matthew entered and wished her good morning. She had never looked better. Awaking early, she had seriously and deliberately thought over her position with regard to her various admirers—what girl does not?—but without any definite conclusion. The machinery of intuition who can explain? But a woman always reasons right when so guided, and men very often as well. It is a part of that wonderful voyage on which every human soul steers alone. There are a few

broad landmarks like the distant shores of Europe and America, but between them rolls a mighty Atlantic of doubts, fears, and perplexities. One vessel may speak another at intervals, which may give either true or false tidings. As the harbour is left, the pilot may guide the vessel so far aright and put it in the right way ; but cross currents and gales are to be encountered alone, which may drive it from its course. In this strife the soul battles alone. Christian travelled the most of his way alone, meeting chiefly dangers and false guides, in one of the greatest works ever written—for Bunyan was one of the greatest and brightest pole-stars of the human race. But when he tried to portray a company travelling together, in the second part of the dream, it was comparatively a great failure. The soul must fight its way alone. Although furnished with weapons, they are useless unless wielded with energy and determination. Clara had thought over her position. Her intuitions urged her to break with Maurice ; her reason, she thought, said differently. A fierce gale of wind was driving the vessel to the burning south, the realm of song and the lotus-eater. Her beauty appeared

to gain a fresh charm, and never shone with a brighter effulgence.

James and Robert came in, and the meal proceeded. When they were seated, conversation became general: the repast was seasoned with the best sauce, although no fruit, ice, or wines decked the board. As Matthew's circumstances improved, he had permitted one, and only one, alteration to be made. Jane, who was always clean and good-tempered, sat in the shop during meals, to avoid interruptions as much as possible. Customers did not very often come in, as the meals of all the people, or nearly so, in Littledale occurred at about the same time. The one excitement was a call from the postman, but Matthew got very few letters of anything but a business nature, and those not very often. This morning James said he heard the postman stop, and Matthew remarked—

“If it is, Jane will bring the letter in.”

But Jane didn't.

“There, you were mistaken,” said Robert.

“I don't believe I was wrong; I know the postman's step too well,” said James.

Clara's tea went the wrong way, and her cup

fell from her hand. All three looked at her in alarm.

"I'll go in the shop and be back directly. Go on with your breakfasts; I shall come back better." So saying, she departed, and soon returned with a brightened colour.

James, who was rather put out at being accused of hearing nothing, said in a rallying manner, "Got a love letter, Clara?"

Clara's face became scarlet. Matthew and Robert looked surprised and curious.

"No, I have not. Perhaps you expected one, and that gave you the 'idea,'" she said, trying to turn the war into the enemy's camp and effect a diversion.

"Very likely. The girls always like James to try on their boots," said Robert, smiling.

"I dare say they do. I am not so clumsy as some people."

"I didn't mean that, James."

"Very well, then; Jane wants a fresh pair, and we'll ask her who shall fit her, and that will decide it," said James, smiling with an affectation of superior address.

"Boys, be quiet. If you have done your breakfast, go to work and don't talk in that way," said Matthew shortly, with sternness.

Both stared. Robert, who had a healthy appetite, looked at an undemolished piece of bread and butter, sighed, and went out with his brother. Clara got up and went upstairs with feverish haste. Matthew looked very grave as Jane removed the breakfast things, which being done he said—

"Tell Miss Clara I wish to speak to her."

Clara came as was desired, with rather a frightened air, but half defiant. Matthew shut the door leading to the shop, saying—

"Clara, what did you receive this morning, and why have you taught Jane to deceive?"

"I lost a pair of gloves when I took the boots to Farmer Bates a day or two ago, and some one sent them back by post."

"Why did not Jane bring them in at once?"

"I never told her not to, indeed I did not, Matthew; and I should not have thought about it, but James and Robert began teasing me. They don't often; they are too fond of money."

"Clara, I am vexed and disappointed you should say such things."

"Well, then, they shouldn't tease. It isn't nice to be teased."

"But there are worse things in life than being teased. James and Robert never deceived me."

"And I haven't, Matthew. I told you I had a pair of gloves by post, and that they are the sort I always wore. You know the colour well enough. I don't want them; you can keep them if you want them;" and Clara began to cry.

Tears are a wonderful weapon. Matthew, seeing her distress, tried to allay it.

"There, there, Clara; it's all right. I have a right to know if you are in correspondence with any one."

"You said that I told Jane to be deceitful and tell lies," said Clara, weeping, and with slight exaggeration.

"No, Clara, not so bad as that; but I believe you now. But who did you meet?"

"Mr. Edward St. John."

"And what did he say?" said Matthew eagerly.

"I forget exactly. I didn't care to speak to him; he is a wicked man."

"Why do you call him so?"

"Because he is going to be married very soon to a lady."

"Did you ever care for him, my dear?" said Matthew, with a sublime ignorance of that peculiarity in the female sex which invariably leads them to deprecate any amount of consideration they may have entertained to a seceded swain, or one whom they believe has done so. Some men try to do the same thing, but never with the same apparent success.

"No, I did not," said Clara, simply and clearly.

Matthew looked relieved, and said so.

"I am glad, my dear, of that. Unequal marriages are seldom very happy."

"But if the husband rises in the world, is it the same thing?"

"By no means. If he is worth a good woman's affection, the love his wife gave him when poor makes success more sweet, and deprives poverty of its most grinding pangs.. But with a good wife no man can be really poor. Frugality and care make a little go a great way. Poverty-stricken

households are nearly always unhappy ones first, and not after, as I have heard it untruly said."

Poor Matthew was speaking of his own heart and feelings. Clara thought of Maurice; he had unwittingly urged his suit more surely than any direct appeal from Maurice could have done. Matthew got up, and took down his books to begin work, as a hint that the interview was over.

Clara went upstairs, but left the gloves on the table, and began to inspect the rest of the parcel that Jane had received. There was a little box containing a pair of garnet earrings. There was no enclosure except a scrap—

"Acceptance buys silence.—E. St. J."

Clara took them out and admired them, but various other considerations moved her. She felt that as long as she remained in Littledale the persecution would continue; at least, she thought so. Matthew had said equal marriages were best. Maurice had sought her in poverty—she would rise with him; besides, he was on the road to distinction, and the visions he had conjured up were enough to disturb the thoughts of any country

girl. She knew her father had fallen from his position, and looked to Maurice to place her among the delights and pleasures that she looked forward to. His earnest suit had produced a certain echo in her heart, so, from a variety of causes, she felt inclined to favour him more than she had ever done before. Besides, she had no friend to confide in, and her knowledge of the world was small. Nevertheless, her true woman's instinct still, but feebly, pulled the other way. Why did Cyrus want to hear from Matthew, if he had left, as Maurice told her, on the loss of the papers? Matthew did not think so, and he was usually right. Then, a life-long residence at the vicarage was not to her taste. The evil suggestions of a more splendid future, vague certainly, were more attractive, from their vagueness, to inexperience. Had not Maurice's vague statements to Matthew and her brothers of the recovery of a part or whole of their lost patrimony satisfied them? And then a delicious day-dream of returning in pomp and power to dazzle the eyes of envious neighbours floated before her. "Besides," she thought, "it is for Matthew's good in the end, though he doesn't know

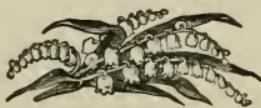
it now." There are very few that can resist "Ye shall be as gods."

A knock came to the door, and Jane presented the handkerchief. Clara blushed.

"Your handkesher, miss. Mr. Jones said he found it, and asked me to give it to you."

"Thank you, Jane. You are a good friend."

Clara went to the front door, and looked up and down the street. James was in the shop, and apparently took no notice.





CHAPTER XIII.

JONATHAN HARKER had dined. He had once by invitation, and now by choice frequently, dined at Higgs's table. The children were delighted with him; they rode "a cock-horse" on his knees, and had often very suspicious dark sticky rims round their mouths on returning from expeditions into the main street. Harker's brow was clear, but in his heart of hearts he was troubled. Here was he, a grown man of mature age, left at the orders of a lawyer's clerk, Jones by name. It went against all precedent, and was a thing by no means to be encouraged. He had very little to do in the matter, whereas he ought to have been the principal figure, his brow adorned with the wreaths of victory; but he had sadly to confess that the facts ran just the other way, and he had

been put out of the principal *rôle*, and accordingly he was chagrined. There was only one consolation: he was not forbidden to watch Jones, whom he hoped to catch tripping, not with a view to a criminal prosecution, but merely that J. H. might stand out prominently in the downfall of the reputation for acuteness of the other, and proudly rise to his lofty and proper position. He had hoped that a figure would be visible to succeeding generations, as they looked back at great generals and leaders, and that the figure would be Jonathan Harker, who did such clever things in the great Chiveydale case; but, *tempora mutantur*, he only came out third or fourth fiddle. And the last drop of bitterness in his cup was supplied, unwittingly, by the offending Jones, who remarked one day—

“When Mr. Pod comes back we must go to work again, Mr. Harker.”

“If he had had any experience I shouldn’t trouble. If he lived in London now, or was a member of the profession, it would be hard; but now it’s bitter. After I got rid of Jack Harrison, and had the field to myself, it comes very hard indeed,” he thought.

But empty lamentations were not Jonathan's specialty. He could not write verses, and consequently could not take his sufferings to market and sell them at so much per sheet, which, from the quantity produced every year, must be a gratifying, if not profitable, arrangement. Being instead a dull, plodding fellow, he braced himself up to the battle. James the Second, it is related, could give a pathetic and interesting account of the battle of the Boyne; but William the Third never attempted. The reason usually adduced is, the one ran away and the other fought and was wounded. Had James lived in the nineteenth century, no doubt he would have written a poem, and found consolation in doing so. The title would most probably have been "The Last Charge of the Celts," who would have been likened to Leonidas and his Spartans at Thermopylæ. True, Leonidas was killed and James not, but the idea is equally good.

So Harker mused, and as he mused a bright thought crossed his brain, not for the first time, but to-day it assumed consistency and proportion. He walked to the Feathers, took a glass of ale to

settle his dinner, drew out his pipe and lit it, and as the fragrant weed became ashes his ideas gathered consistency. He thought of Maurice's confident manner and his easy way with the money, which Pod had told him about; and as the smoke went floating up into the blue sky, Harker became convinced, from previous experience, Maurice had or could lay his hand on something else to sell. For, argued Harker to himself, "If the papers were the last chance he had, and the last shot in the locker, he would have stuck out more, and been more disappointed he didn't get all he wanted. No, my boy, you are up to something. Not just yet; you'll leave here and take it with you; and when you do, if he gets a chance, there will be some one else about, and his name is, yours truly, J. Harker." And the more he thought it over, the more reasonable it appeared to him.

With his mind full of these thoughts, Harker looked round and saw Jones quietly walk down the street on the opposite side, and disappear between two houses. In an instant Harker followed him cautiously, but surely, at a distance. By-and-by he came to a lane and disappeared. Harker

looked and saw a gap in the hedge that had been used before, but not many times. He thought, “The sticks are freshly broken.” Under the hedge Maurice walked a little way, till, seeing no one, he crossed the field, followed by Harker. Another hedge, and then a lane, which terminated in another. A female figure came in sight, and rapidly joined Jones. Harker vaulted over a gate more quickly than would have been thought possible from his years, and ran to the hedge of the lane in a diagonal direction. He soon found a convenient point of sight, and saw the face of the female. It was the face of Clara Maunder. Harker nearly danced with delight.

“Now,” he thought, “I have you, Jones. I can always ‘follow the hen bird,’ or blow the gaff and her friends won’t let her go, and you’ll be sure to come back for her, sure as eggs is eggs.”

As he walked back and turned over his discovery, he was quite elated. “I’ll write,” he thought, “when I’ve been to the vicarage, to see if there are any fresh orders.” He found none, but got writing materials from Sally Grimes, and composed his letter:—

"Littledale.

"HONoured SIR,

"I have found out a most important thing, which you will be glad to hear of. Miss C. M., who lives with M. E., is keeping company with M. J. They are very thick, of course. That is how he got what he sold you; she took them for him, for certain. He does not attend to business much, so feels independent, which makes me think there is more to be got from the same quarter. If you wish, I will tell at home and stop it. You would buy cheaper and more straightforward from M. E. He don't call regular, as a young man should, so M. E. is not agreeable.

"Your humble servant,

"J. H."

Sally Grimes's fellow-servant was going into Littledale, so Harker gave her the letter to post. As she was going he called her back. "Mr. Silas Pod may not be at the Cedars," he thought, "though he told me to write there." So he added under "Silas Pod, Esq.," "Or H. St. John Thompson, Esq." "It will be sure to be opened

now," he thought, and let the handmaid depart. Sally asked Mr. Harker to stop to tea, which he willingly did, as he thought nothing fresh would turn up for an hour or so. The tea was good; the toast well buttered and done to a turn. Tea took a long time, and Sally got more and more confidential. Her regular young man had shown symptoms of "hanging off," and she in turn had great hopes of leading Harker captive. Eating and drinking, the time passed away. The tea was followed by an appetizing supper of tripe and onions, after which Sally entreated Harker to light his pipe, which he did very willingly, until it was late, when a ring came at the bell and Sally went to answer it.

Maurice, having given the office boy instructions to tell any one that called he would be in shortly, and to wait or leave a note, departed and stole by a short cut to Sally's hut, as we have seen. Unconscious of the espionage exercised on him, he greeted Clara warmly, and they strolled in the direction of Sally's abode. When they arrived they found it empty, to the great apparent astonishment of both. Clara said—

"Then I must go back, Maurice."

"You had better sit down a minute and rest, my love."

Just then the clock struck three.

"There, it is three o'clock, and I must be back to make the tea."

"Sit down a minute, precious. You are tired; the day is hot."

"Very well. I can't stay long."

"Anything happened at home?"

"Oh yes. Mr. Edward St. John sent back a pair of gloves by post, and inside was a pair of red stone earrings."

"What insolence!"

"And enclosed a scrap of paper with 'Acceptance buys silence' on it, and I was so frightened when the postman called. Jane sits in the shop while we have breakfast now—they seem very fond of her—and she didn't bring in anything. My tea went the wrong way, I was so startled. I went out and she gave me the letter."

"Well? I am so interested."

"And then James and Robert began to tease me. When breakfast was over I went upstairs,

and when they were in the shop Matthew called me down and asked me what it was all about. He said no happiness came from unequal marriages."

"And what did you tell him?"

"The letter was some gloves I dropped; but he has not been the same since, and I am so uncomfortable."

"I should think you were. We must go at once."

"Where, Maurice?"

"To London and get married."

"I should be frightened it would not be right. Oh, Maurice dear, how can you ask me such a thing!"

"My dear, I will get you lodgings and see you every day, and in a fortnight we can be married and snap our fingers at all of them."

"Oh, Maurice, I am frightened. Let me go. I want to go home; I want to go home," said Clara, becoming really frightened.

"My dear, you are fainting. Here is a herb drink to revive you. Sally gave me some of it."

"I want to go. You ought not to keep me here."

"I will, when you have drank a drop to revive you," and he poured out a teacupful of gin. It was quite up to proof. "It will be hot in your mouth, but swallow it quick, pet."

Clara did not know the smell of gin, and, believing what Maurice told her, took a good gulp, but was frightened and said—

"It's poison ; I know it is."

"No, it isn't. Try to sit down a minute."

Which she did. She had swallowed a good mouthful, which, added to her excitement, made the blood course through her veins like fire. It mounted to the temple of virgin fear and bashfulness, and broke open the door to the tempter.

"Now, my pet, think over the fate before you—to be tortured and bullied for everything, right or wrong. You never asked Edward to write to you ?"

"No, I didn't. I won't be kept down always; I'm treated too bad."

The fumes were rising.

"No, love; so to-morrow I will be ready to take you away—or to-night, if you are not afraid. I will meet you in the lane behind your house."

"I can't. I shall be frightened, indeed I shall, dear; let me go home."

"You can go if you like, and Edward will write again and Matthew see the letter next time most likely, and then you know how angry he will be. You pretend you like me, but you don't."

"I do indeed. The things seem going round, I think. Oh, Maurice!"

"No, no; it is fancy. You will be better in a minute."

"Oh no; I get worse instead of better."

"Say you will come. I will have a carriage ready at the end of the village towards Salisbury. They can't catch us. The train runs faster than a horse or horses; they can't overtake us."

"Oh, Maurice, what will Mrs. Parkhouse say?"

"I'll take you to her, and you can be married from there, and in a glad future the present will look an ugly dream."

"Oh, I can't."

"You never answered Edward St. John, and he will write again, I tell you."

"Matthew will be angry and sorry."

"No, he won't, I tell you; he will never know it."

“ Oh, I can’t, indeed.”

“ Very well. Cyrus Clark will be here in a day or two, and Matthew will have you up before him, and he will scold you as a naughty child.”

The thought of the fancied humiliation wrought what few other things could.

“ When did you say, Maurice ? ”

“ At ten o’clock I will be in the lane at the back of the house, and we can walk. Don’t bring much ; we can buy what we want in London.”

“ Very well, I will come ; but oh, Maurice, I am leaving the world for you.”

“ No, you are not ; you will enter it all bright, splendid, and dressed like a queen.”

“ Now, Maurice, good-bye till ten o’clock ; ” and with a shower of kisses from his lips she went out. Maurice tried to follow. “ No, Maurice. Wait till ten o’clock ; I shall not fail ; ” and with a gesture of entreaty and command she was gone.

Maurice stayed looking at the door, when the bed creaked. He jumped up startled. It moved, and Sally came out.

“ What are you doing there ? ”

“ Listening.”

“What do you want?”

“Twenty pounds, to be sure, or I shall go and tell Mr. Elgood, and how will you look then?” and the hag leered and laughed.

“And do you think I’ll give you twenty?”

“I’m sure you will, dearie.”

“I will, on one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“I can’t spare time to watch you; I must lock you in.”

The old wrinkled mouth laughed out an eldritch scream of derision.

“You wouldn’t let me out.”

“Come to my lodgings, then, at half-past nine, and I will give you the money.”

“Honour bright?”

“Honour bright.”

“Why not before?”

“Because you would go and tell, to be sure, and get what you could elsewhere.”

“I can tell after you are gone.”

“Yes, but that will be too late.”

“I shall have thirty pounds, you know.”

“If you try for a penny more than twenty

pounds, I lock you in and chance any one letting you out in time."

Maurice's eyes glared, and Sally trembled.

"I only asked, you know, Mr. Jones."

"Then ask again and you will get nothing, curse you!"

Maurice bounded across the lane and was gone. He had not much time to spare, and he felt that in a little time he would be no longer master of himself.

Sally went to the teacup and tossed off the rest of the gin. It was a pity to waste it, she thought. She then bustled about, restored the chair to its place, and straightened the hut—at least what she called straightening. It had not been properly cleaned in living memory. There is a natural affinity between dirt and vice.





CHAPTER XIV.

MAURICE took a cup of tea at his lodgings and sat down to think. He had not long to do it in, but mapped out the campaign in a style at once neat and effective. He first went to the general toy shop and looked at many things, eventually choosing a toy cart of small value. As the woman was tying it up, he said, in a reflective tone—

“Do you keep the Notes of Elegance now?”

“Oh, Mr. Jones, you mean imitation notes on the Bank of Elegance?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, we don’t sell to every one.”

“I only want them to pretend to burn five-pound notes. I have some friends coming to supper with me to-night, and I want to mystify them. Let me have half a dozen.”

They were produced and paid for, as well as the cart; but the mistress of the shop hadn't change for a half-sovereign, so said sweetly—

"Let it be, Mr. Jones. You can pay to-morrow."

"Oh no, I want change. I will call for it to-morrow morning. Keep the half-sovereign till then," and was gone before the dealer could protest.

"That will keep her tongue quiet," he thought; and so it did. He then, from the not very large stock of the local confectioner, selected a few things for supper; but the supper must have been a very substantial one for one person. Time remorselessly crept on, and he must go back to the office for a short time to shut up. This was accomplished just as Joshua and Harold returned.

"I want a holiday to-morrow, sir, please," he said to Joshua.

"Well, then, you can't."

"Will you spare me till after dinner?"

"You must be back punctually."

"And if I am not?"

"You needn't come any more," said Joshua,

who had found Edward St. John anything but an agreeable companion all day. He felt quite safe ; Maurice could not take him at his word.

“ Very well, sir. What shall I do when I come in ? ”

“ I or Mr. Harold will show you. But the office boy—where is he ? ”

“ Gone, sir.”

“ Then step over to the Feathers, and order a carriage and pair to go to Stratton at eleven o’clock to-morrow morning. Mr. Gabriel wants it urgently.”

“ Please, sir, write an order.”

“ What for ? ”

“ It is safer. A line in pencil will do.”

Joshua took out his pencil, and scribbled on a piece of paper—

“ Carriage at eleven.—J. SMITH.”

Maurice took the scrap and went over to the Feathers. He stepped into the office a minute, and wrote “ten” over the “eleven,” which he crossed out.

“ Ah, Mrs. Tyack, Mr. Smith wants a carriage—a good pair.”

Mrs. Tyack smiled. Maurice leant over the bar and waxed confidential. Sinking his voice, he said—

“It’s a queer time to want it, but Mr. Smith will pay you all right. It’s ten o’clock to-night.”

“Nonsense.”

“Here is his order. He wrote it down to be sure there was no mistake.”

“Yes, but I had better send over and ask him.”

“Oh no. I will run back and ask, if you like, but I know it’s all right.”

“Lor’, Mr. Jones, but what’s it wanted for?” said the hostess in a persuasive tone.

“If I was sure you would not tell a soul till to-morrow?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t whatever, if it’s a secret.”

Maurice was puzzled, and feigned to hesitate; in reality, to think of a likely ruse. Leaning over, he softly whispered, “County election.”

“My gracious, Mr. Jones! How pleased John will be! There is no mention of it in the papers, though, yet.”

“He mustn’t be told—no one told for a few days; it is a very great secret.” Maurice nodded

and looked wise. "Better tell the man to drive to the end of the Mill Lane, near the town. Your stables are there."

"Very well; but how about it? I don't quite understand."

The good lady was suspicious still. She had never had such an order before.

"If any of the freeholders come in for a glass, don't be too pressing for payment," said Maurice, who improved the idea as he worked it out, and handed a sovereign to the hostess.

Like many a trader and voter before, her scruples vanished; the real cash before her eyes was everything. The accustomed smile lit up her face, and she was vanquished. Just then seven o'clock struck. Maurice started; he had many things yet to do, and "time and tide wait for no man."

That evening the hostess of the Feathers walked about in that agreeable state of mind the possession, fancied or otherwise, of a secret always imparts. A hen with one chick was nothing to it. John Tyack shared in the elation visible in his wife's face. They were both extra polite to the fre-

queters. Price and Spears were at the table. Harold Smith dropped in, and did not seem so much excited as John thought he ought with the glorious news of an election in prospect, plenty of beer and law to be paid for, and liberally too. In the fullness of his heart, John went into the parlour, and, clearing his throat, said in a tone of mingled patronage and importance—

“ Gentlemen, you will much oblige me by drinking a bowl of punch.”

Spears said, “ How much each, in that case ? ”

But John waved his hand grandly, saying, “ At mine, Mr. Spears. I shall take no money to-night from any one here. I see my friends round me, and that is enough.”

The company stared, but said nothing ; they thought that John’s better half would soon reduce him to his normal state of subjection. Harold winked at Price, who laughed quietly. Bates the miller had just dropped in, with his cousin the farmer, and was sitting at the other end of the table, looking at Spears and Price. He softly tapped his forehead with his forefinger, and nodded to his cousin. John continued—

"If agreeable, I will sit down and help the company to drink it."

He was gone for about five minutes, and returned bearing a steaming bowl; added to which, wonder of wonders, the hostess followed, bearing a tray of glasses and smiling mysterious smiles. There was no doubt about it now. John was warmly invited to sit down. It was a monster bowl; but Spears, Price, Harold, and the two Bateses felt quite equal to the occasion, aided by John, who, helping the rest, contrived to get two glasses to his own share to their one. In process of time the bowl was empty. Harold proposed another, to be paid for by the company, which proposition was carried *nem. con.* The second bowl Mrs. Tyack compounded alone. John was getting rather unsteady on his legs; but, contrary to her usual practice, his wife took no notice of the fact. The tap-room waiter brought it in, and was rewarded with a glass. It was ladled round, and the company began to be jovial in the extreme and ready for any wild vagary, when John stood up, after two or three efforts, and said—

"Gentlemen, feeling as I do the importance

of the occasion, and that we ought to have good members of Parliament to represent us, I beg to propose the health of all true Blues."

Harold, the least affected, said with a laugh, "John's evidently going to stand for the county at the next election."

This produced cheering and laughter enough to split the old roof. The humbler soakers in the tap-room came to the door, and joined their cheers to the noise with deafening shouts; when these were a little subsided, the company all suddenly stared at each other, and were silent, for the sound of other voices, trampling feet, and shouting aroused their attention. They gazed at each other in stupid wonder when Mrs. Tyack rushed in, and going to her husband said, "Come here, John; you're a fool! They are getting the fire-engine out! Go and help."

"What for?" was asked in an unusual chorus of doubt and disbelief.

But the hostess returned with emphasis, "Go and see," and in two minutes the room was empty.

When Maurice left Mrs. Tyack, he went to his lodgings. Having borrowed a time-table and traced out the route to London, it was not much trouble, as once at Salisbury the coast was clear. A late train was due at 11.50, reaching London at about three. So, writing the figures down on a piece of paper, he changed his clothes for those he thought the most suitable, slipped a turn-screw and hammer in his pocket, and went out. Events had been almost too quick for him the last day or two. The letter to Cyrus had quickened his movements; but fearing further complications, he had posted it when returning from Sally's the last time. He could defy him now. Besides, Edward St. John's continued approaches he had only heard of to-day; they showed him no time was to be lost. Added to this, the next little idea he purposed carrying out was dangerous, if promising. He had been much struck when the sympathetic writing had revealed a sketch, and taken the opportunity when copying at Stratton to secure for himself a copy of a portion of the writing, and studied it in solitude with the sketch before his mind's eye; and the sentence, "Let him carefully see that

Littledale Church is undisturbed, and the pulpit of the priest shall stand a memorial of trust," appeared to him to be a distinct intimation that something else would be found in the same place of concealment. He had tried once or twice to get the keys of the church from Harker and Pod, but had found it impracticable; so, without exactly making the demand, he had drawn back before being absolutely refused. He had also stimulated Higgs to try and get them, but with no better result.

So, adding a piece of candle and box of matches, both carefully tied up in paper, to his other stores, he departed. There is always something, even to a man holding a different creed, repulsive in violating a place of worship. Added to this feeling, Maurice, like all bad men, was very superstitious at times. A good many highwaymen and cut-throats must have assisted, in the world's history, in drowning old women because they were said to ride on broomsticks; and nearly every man draws out a morality to suit his own case, reprobating what he imagines he will have no particular temptation to commit. Now, Maurice was very hard in his

thoughts on those who go to church to make a profit of a good character and attract more custom to their business, reasoning that a smaller amount of blame rested on those who did not go, even if they committed worse actions. A similar train of thought made him tremble, not shrink, at the thought of breaking into the church. The idea had not been before him very long, and he had not had time to drug his conscience on the subject. It needs time to deceive the heart well, and to deaden the stings of conscience and self-reproach in a new direction, even if it has been done with success in others. The duellist shoots his friend, and the savage kills and scalps women and children of hostile tribes ; and yet, if brought together, each would look down on the other as a monster of iniquity, and himself upright and honourable in the extreme.

There remained in Maurice's heart a sort of feeling for the fabric of the church, although the admonitions he had heard while sitting in it had touched him not one whit, or if they did were soon forgotten. There was a reverence in his heart somewhere, but it was for the gift and not the altar.

But with a pertinacious putting down of troublesome thoughts, he set out, and swiftly but quietly climbed over the wall and went round to the back of the church. A heavy dew gave a chilliness to the atmosphere, and once or twice he looked over his shoulder, but was careful not to look at a point of "God's acre" where a grass-grown mound covered the remains of his mother and father. The windows were low and hung at the sides, quite unsecured at the top. He tried to lift one of them quietly, but found the fastening still held it tight. On trying to move it with the hammer, a pane of glass broke and made a noise. He stopped and listened. There was no sound except a slight wind moving the trees. He passed his hand in and undid the window. Here another difficulty stood in the way: the cross-bar of iron denied further access. He tried the screws, but failed to move them; there was not light enough to use the turn-screw properly.

The clock struck eight in the tower above, and the sound stimulated his energies; it reminded him of the short time left. Again and again the turn-screw was applied in strong endeavour, but to no

use. After several minutes of vain attempt, he altered his tactics, and with the hammer drove the turnscrew like a chisel. It went beneath the bar, and he prized it gradually up, till one of the screws was sufficiently far out to draw with the claw end of the hammer. "What would I not give for an iron chisel!" he thought. "But no; it would create suspicion if I borrowed one." Another screw was loosened after another tug or two, and there only remained the bar; that went in some little way, being held in its place by the iron plate.. This being removed, the bar was loose, but not free from another plate at the other end. With quickened pulse, and trusting, from the obscurity and distance from human dwellings, that no one would hear, he gave it three or four blows. It bent inwards; with his arm he bent it further, and then, catching hold, pulled himself slowly and painfully up. At length he wriggled through, but nearly fell head foremost. As his eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, he got on the back of a pew, and from thence let himself down to the seat.

The air of the church was cold. Shadows from the windows moved on the floor, as the trees, shaken

by the wind, produced quivering forms, half impalpable, and weird-looking in the extreme. He now struck a match. It blazed up and went out. He struck another under the ledge for the books in front, and this time lit the candle ; and now the discovery he made filled his heart with fear. The candle was crushed in his efforts to pass through the window, and the grease had fallen in flakes into the paper from a great part of it. Saving the scraps of grease, he went carefully up the aisle to the pulpit, and ascended the steps. He soon unfastened the door, but the draught caused by opening it again blew out the candle, and he had to relight it. It was more easily done this time, as the wick was hot. A piece of the paper he carried was soon made into a cone to support the candle, as he required both hands to work with. After a time it was fixed moderately steady, when he adjusted the turnscrew to the joint nearest the centre of the pulpit, and with a tap of the hammer fixed it. Another rather harder, and it went further in ; a third, and the rush of wings caused him to pause. A shade passed over, and, palsied with terror, he stopped work. The sound was not that of the

wings of a bird. It immediately occurred to his imagination that in the pictures he had seen of evil spirits they never had feathers on their wings, and the sound was produced by a similar cause. A half exclamation caused him to look round ; it was unlike anything caused by the human voice. He could see nothing. Persuading himself it was fancy, he bent again to the task. The iron had now fairly entered. The wooden handle deadened the sound, which would have been much greater if an iron chisel had been used, but the turn-screw bent under the strain ; so, drawing it out with a tap or two of the hammer, he put it in the reverse way, to obtain greater leverage. The iron bent again, but the board trembled, a rusty nail gave way, and part came up. Again the sound of wings assailed his ears, but this time he fancied he recognized it as the leaves of the great Bible being disturbed, which had been left through Higgs's idleness on the desk in front.

“It was the wind,” he murmured half audibly, and despised himself for his fears. The piece of board came up. It was worn thin with the use of years where the minister had Sunday after

Sunday stood exhorting and reproving; it broke in the middle. Another piece was soon wrenched up, and a hole about eight inches square, but of somewhat irregular shape, allowed him to plunge in his hand. As he was about to do so, the sound of wings, this time nearer, and knocks at the pulpit door, caused him to stop. His brow was bedewed with perspiration; terror and fear caused the beads of moisture to stand out for a minute on his forehead and then roll down his face. The noise ceased, and with desperation he plunged in his hand and found nothing. Taking the candle, he carefully looked in, and saw below a tin or iron box covered with rust. He had no fears now. Lying down, he found it was still beyond his reach, and to stoop low enough he must open the pulpit door—he had closed it to keep off the draught. He opened it, and extending himself, plunged in his hand and brought up the treasure trove. He put it on the pulpit floor, and proceeded to replace the wood. As he did so, he felt a slight touch on his shoulder. Too frightened to look round, his excited imagination conjured up an evil spirit behind him. One piece of wood was replaced,

and he secured the box in his breast-pocket for safety, buttoning his coat. He was about to replace the other piece when a rush of the leathery wings was heard and the candle thrown down and almost extinguished. Wild with terror, he bounded down the stairs, sped along the aisle, and was through the window in an incredibly short space of time. He took no thought to replace the window; his only desire was to leave the spot.

As he gained the grass outside, the church clock began to strike. It struck nine. Spell-bound till it had finished, he climbed the wall and sought his lodgings. Gaining his room unobserved, he removed a little of the dirt; his heart began to still its wild pulsations. "It's all right," he thought, "and by the time any alarm is given I shall be far away."

Hastily packing in a small parcel his various purchases of food and a bottle of wine, he filled his pocket-flask with spirits and gave his clothes another brushing, when he heard footsteps on the stairs. Some one opened the door, and Sally presented herself. She looked so wild and unearthly an object he was quite surprised when she began

to speak, and the sound of a human voice was quite a relief.

“ Well, I am come, Mr. Jones, according to promise. I hope you have the gold you promised me ? ”

Maurice looked scared and wild, but with tolerable clearness said, “ No, I haven’t. I couldn’t get change, and you don’t understand five-pound notes. I must send it to you.”

“ I won’t be cheated like that.”

“ Well, here is the money ; but it is in notes—five-pound notes, Sally.”

“ Then I will have more, to pay for the trouble of changing them.”

“ That’s not fair, Sally. Here are four five-pound notes ; ” and he carelessly took out those of the Bank of Elegance and laid four down, but placed the other two a little way off.

Sally made a grab at all six, and secured them in her pocket.

“ Now I’ve got them.”

“ Give me back my two,” said Maurice in pretended entreaty.

“ No, I shan’t. Haven’t you got anything to drink, dearie ? I shall be more comfortable.”

Maurice had bought more spirits than his flask held, and showed Sally the bottle. He felt no further alarm; another idea had entered his brain; so, collecting his parcels, he said—

“I shall be back in a quarter of an hour; don’t drink all the brandy, Sally.” (Sally was silently though swiftly consuming the liquor.) “I shall soon be back, and then you must give me the money you have of mine. Do you hear?—the two extra notes.”

Sally grinned and said, “Come when you like, you’ll get nothing out of me.”

Maurice went downstairs, but shut the door noisily as if angry, taking the opportunity of turning the lock and removing the key. Sally tried to stand up, but not very successfully; after two or three efforts, she steered to the bed, fell across it, and went to sleep, performing a loud *obbligato* on the nasal trombone.





CHAPTER XV.

CLARA walked swiftly back through the lane from Sally's cottage. She could hardly direct her steps, and a desire to sit down and sleep by the roadside almost overpowered her, but eventually she reached Matthew's shop in safety. To go upstairs and wash her face and hands was her first idea, which she was carrying out, when, the kitchen door being open, she saw Jane trying on a pair of gloves, and James superintending the operation with great interest. Now, the consumption of ardent spirits is seldom attended with evenness of temper. She remembered James's speeches of the morning, and, putting her head in, said—

“I am glad they fit; I don’t want them.”

Jane and James immediately reddened, although

doing no great harm. James recovered himself first, and said—

“Pity to waste them, Clara, as you don’t want them.”

Jane looked very sheepish and took them off, and James went through the passage into the shop. The spurt of ill-temper, however, was over, and Clara, remembering her obligations to Jane, continued—

“I don’t want them, really, Jane; but Mr. James said something to me this morning, and I wanted to pay him out.”

“I don’t want them, miss, now.”

“Nonsense, Jane; if you won’t, you won’t, and I will give you another pair.”

“Thank you, Miss Clara,” said Jane, mollified.

“New ones, Jane.”

Jane’s eyes danced with delight and pleasure.

“After tea I want you to come and help me arrange my things.” She felt quite incapable, if alone, of bidding farewell to each relic of the past, and so wished for Jane’s presence as a check to her feelings. Each bit of ribbon or small trifle that Matthew had given her would seem to reproach her for her intended desertion.

Jane promised compliance, and Clara went upstairs. She sat quite still in her room, without moving or speaking. She thought of Matthew's grief, her brothers' anger, and feared no future beneficence or grandeur would recompense, in their eyes, her desertion. The mind was reassuming its sway; but Maurice's pleading was really and palpably so truly from his heart, and, woman-like, she was touched with his devotion. Besides, she reflected with an inconsistent bias, Matthew had, in their conversation of the morning, half approved it, and the future was tinted with gorgeous fancies. Then the kindness of all at home rushed into her mind, like the surging tide washes over the rocks, making them wet and slippery, but not moving them an inch from their places. She wept a few tears at the thought, but the new world offered in exchange more than counterbalanced any temporary feelings of regret. She began to move one or two of the things in the room. Perfect quiescence was now unendurable. The vase of dried grass she placed on the mantelpiece, and cleared the top of the drawers for the convenience of packing. One by one she moved the small articles endeared to her

by a thousand memories. The last thing was her mother's Bible. Matthew had got possession of it, and given it to her. Her hand trembled so that she could scarcely hold it. How could she take it with her, she thought, or how leave it behind? And then the desire to read it came in all its force, but fear half restrained her. With an effort she seated herself on the bed, and, placing the book on her lap, opened it. The page looked blurred through her tears. She passed her hand across her eyes and tried to fix her attention. She was vaguely conscious of the name of the book at which she had accidentally opened, and was about to choose a chapter; there were three verses before the leaf would require to be turned over. In a low tone she began to read, "And it came to pass in the days—" when Jane knocked at the door and told her tea was ready. Everyday life broke in again, so, placing the book under the counterpane of the bed, she descended to the family circle.

Clara poured out the tea, surprised they could all talk on ordinary topics. She wondered if Edward St. John would write after she was gone, and what they would all say, and if they would

open the letter or leave it unopened. And then the pattern on the teacups arrested her attention, and she wondered who would pour out the tea in future —whether Jane would be promoted, or one of the others officiate.

Matthew was more silent than usual ; he appeared to rouse himself to answer with an effort. To Clara's mind, in its present state of morbid activity, he seemed to reproach her. His silence was more oppressive than the sternest reproaches.

Jane cleared the tea table, and time crept on, but, it appeared to Clara, with leaden wings. The strain on her faculties seemed too great to bear. After an interval she went upstairs, accompanied by the housemaid. The small stock of clothes were soon arranged, not without wonder, both silent and expressed, on Jane's part at a part of the best of the clothes being put in a drawer by itself. This, however, was soon swallowed up in the feeling of gratitude. Clara was so liberal in presents of odds and ends that Jane's thanks came thicker and faster. As they poured out, Clara cherished the idea she would do one good action at least before she left. All was finished, and Jane retired. Clara

went downstairs in a state of feverish, nervous excitement.

The shop being closed, James and Robert came in. James got down the stock-book, and Robert began posting up the business of the day from the day-book to the ledger. Save the noise made by the scratching of their pens over the paper, there was a silence which was almost insupportable, which Clara, for lack of anything else to say, broke by the remark—

“ You are very quiet to-night, Matthew,”

“ Yes, my dear, I am, and when your brothers have done I should like to speak to all three of you.”

James and Robert at once laid aside their books and pens, declaring they had finished, and Matthew resumed.

“ I don’t know how it is, but I seem to see things more clearly to-night than for years; in fact, than I ever did.”

“ In what way, Matthew? Any new sort of stock wanted? ” said James, with evident interest.

“ No, not business, but the future. I have thought a great deal of what Jones promised to do

for us, and have sorrowfully come to the conclusion that he told lies."

Clara turned very red, and bent over her sewing, of which she had done nothing, having merely held it in her hand. James and Robert looked quite surprised.

"I really can't think that, Matthew," said Robert, with animation.

"He has not come again, and the other evening promised to call and did not do so, then or next day. He is a very clever young man, but of no fixed principle, I am afraid."

"He did not ask for any money, though, even as a loan or an account," said James, reflectively.

"And is that all, James? There is a good deal in life beyond money. Mr. Gabriel St. John has money. Is he happy or good? I do not allude to his behaviour to me; I think he was deceived in that matter by others. The truth will come out some day."

"What else do you mean, Matthew? I really can't exactly understand," said Robert. Matthew's tone of conviction was rapidly removing his scepticism of Maurice's evil intentions.

"I wish you to understand that I am much afraid—in fact, am certain in my own mind—he had some other ideas in coming here. What they were I do not know, but they were evil."

"What evil could he intend or think?" said James.

"You always said he paid his rent punctually and to the day," said Robert.

"There is a certain shallow persuasiveness about a bad man that attracts at first, but not afterwards. A wise man once wrote, 'Show me a man's friends and I will tell you what he is like.' Now, Jones's friends are all those he has business connections with or hopes to get something from; he never forms an acquaintance from respect for the goodness of man or woman."

"He has not much opportunity in such a little place, and is alone in the world," said Robert.

"'A tree is known by its fruit.' He lends money to Mr. Harold Smith for the purpose, to say the most charitable thing of it, of dissipation."

"He is a servant and must please his master. Perhaps he does not do it willingly," said Clara, who was on thorns at the direction the conversation had taken.

"Clara, my dear, we do nothing of that sort unwillingly. I don't sell goods to those I don't choose."

"Those who you think won't pay, perhaps."

"Not altogether, although that is not a kind or just way to put it. I have trusted some I thought would not be able to pay, and they have not always been able to."

"But that only shows you are kind, as you always have been," said Robert.

"We are wandering from the point. I shall write to Jones to-morrow, and tell him I decline any further transactions, except of a business nature. He will not trouble us again, and we shall be saved vain thoughts of sudden wealth. There is nothing so fatal to regular industry, nothing kills perseverance more surely, than idle dreaming."

"Some people get to hear of things to make them rich, though," said Robert.

"And money may be employed for good," said James.

"I would rather not talk any more just now, as I feel anything but well to-night. To-morrow we

will talk it over again, if you like. I should wish supper ; it is growing late."

The bell was rung, and Jane got supper, assisted by Clara with unusual willingness, but an unusually quiet manner. There is a certain gentle sadness in doing anything for the last time ; it reminds us of a time when we shall have done with all things. As they sat down the church clock struck nine. The strokes seemed to fall on Clara's heart like drops of lead. She again wondered the others ate and drank.

The supper was concluded as usual. James and Robert went upstairs, as they usually did, to discuss in their bedroom the events of the day, and plan fresh schemes for the morrow. With an uncontrollable impulse, Clara went and kissed Matthew, saying in a half sob—

"Good night, Matthew."

"Good night, my dear. You are very like your mother."

Clara felt a lump in her throat ; she could not speak, and half repented.

"Tell Jane to lock up. I shan't want anything more."

She turned and was gone. Steadying her voice with an effort, she told Jane to go to bed and she would see to the locking up for the night. She waited in a fever of excitement while Jane went round the little kitchen, adjusting various articles and wiping off supposititious particles of dust, but at length she went. Clara crossed the garden and with trembling hands undid the bolts of the door. As she looked at the sky, she fancied the stars shone less kindly than they were wont to do, and again half repented, but the thought that it was too late to turn back urged her forward. Her very natural courage sustained her resolution, and, strange to say, fear was an ingredient in the mental process. Fear of Edward St. John, fear of being humiliated before Cyrus (as Maurice had skilfully suggested), fear that Maurice, if disappointed, would call boldly for her next day, and the consequent anger of Matthew and her brothers, all cried—"Forward!"

When Jane left the kitchen, she found the parlour door open, and thinking every one had gone upstairs, shut it; so that Clara, on returning and seeing it closed, imagined Matthew had retired.

She dragged her trembling limbs upstairs, and packed a small parcel of necessaries she intended to take. It was half-past nine some time since ; she looked out at the dark lane, and fancied that horrid shapes rose in the darkness. A low whistle sounded. She descended the stairs, her eyes dim and cheeks wet with tears, and yet wished to go forward. The passage is gained, the kitchen passed, and the garden now lies behind Clara Mauder for ever. The door opens, and a kiss tells her Maurice is there. He did not say anything, but took hold of her hand firmly, and led her swiftly along. She trembled when they came in front of the closed shop ; they had to pass it to gain the other end of the town.

“ I want to go back, Maurice ; indeed I do.”

“ No, precious. Never mind, love, what you have left behind ; the future is before us.”

The carriage was waiting, and Maurice carried the bundle. They jumped in ; the driver lashed his horses into a gallop. The turnpikes were opened one after another. The flashes of light from the flints on the roads gave a spectral appearance to their progress. Salisbury is reached and

the railway station gained; there are just ten minutes to get tickets. Maurice gave the driver a sovereign; he grinned, and Maurice said—

“People can’t see through a sovereign.”

“Yes, they can, with the other eye,” remarked the driver, as one who stated a natural fact.

Maurice put two in his hand, and remarked, “I went alone, you know; there was no one with me. Bait your horses and don’t hurry back.”

“Right you are, sir.”

Maurice took two first-class tickets, and a bribe to the guard secured a vacant compartment. The train rushed off, and Maurice Jones had left Littledale for ever.

Matthew sat up. The last kiss that Clara imprinted on his face had set him thinking, but the thoughts did not come quickly. When Jane closed the door he made no sign, but still sat up. His mind wandered over the events of his life, and a wish to have done with turmoil suggested the idea of the tossing sea and restless foam, which in turn brought thoughts of the great rivers entering

into it. He seemed to see them calmly and peacefully rolling onwards, and then he saw a great river flowing across a plain in front of him with steady and tideless motion. The ambitions of life seemed a small thing now, for a great joy filled his heart, which beat with dreadful violence. The water before him appeared misty and turbid, as indistinct shapes crowded round. His eyeballs half started with desire to grasp by more perfect sight the strange vision. The further shore drew nearer and nearer ; there were people walking on it. A dim thought that he was not fit to mingle with them, they all looked so peaceful and majestic, passed from his mind like the breath passes from a mirror ; and then a strange courage seemed to fill his soul, a new life seemed breathed from a better and purer atmosphere. He felt the bottom, but the shingle gave no sound. A bright form passed ; the mortal lips of Matthew moved, but very feebly, and the one word “Eunice” floated on the silent air of night. The bright form spoke not, pointing to a greater light beyond ; but Matthew looked back half sorrowfully to the farther shore. It was invisible in the distance. Turning again to

the pointing angel form, the heart said, for the lips moved not, “ All three ! ”

The soul had passed without pain and struggle to a glad and bright eternity before the Great White Throne.

“ While Valour’s haughty champions wait
Till all their scars are shown,
Love walks unchallenged through the gate,
To sit beside the Throne.”





CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN Maurice fled on the wings of terror from Littledale Church, the flapping of the wings were renewed, as if in triumph over the expiring candlewick. Had he only summoned sufficient courage to look up, he would have found it was a harmless bat—which had entered the edifice by the opened window, attracted by the light, and at length flown against it—that had produced the paroxysm of terror in his mind and his subsequent flight. The flame of the candle went down very low; but in getting in at the window the tallow had been in a great measure broken away from the wick, and in consequence the fire easily crept along the greasy cotton. The piece of dry wood lay across, overturned by Maurice in his flight. It charred, got red, and finally burst into a flame, which com-

municated to the floor and rest of the pulpit. A dull red flame ascended, and the edifice filled with smoke. The tongue of devouring fire licked over the edge, charred the leaves of the Bible, and finally caught the desk that supported it, the Bible falling with a loud crash.

Jacob Higgs had completed his supper, and went out into the cool night air to smoke his usual pipe. He was too good a judge to adjourn to the Feathers ; Mrs. Higgs cured him of that years ago ; so, thinking a slight walk would aid his digestive organs, he strolled in the direction of the church. "How thick it looks inside!" he thought. "I should believe it was smoke, if I didn't know better ;" and then a red glare seemed to dance on the windows. Still he looked and thought in silent wonder and placid amazement. But when he heard the Bible fall with a crash, throwing up sparks right and left, he became instantly aware of the danger. He saw in the dim perspective of the future a possible loss of snug fees and perquisites, and the clerky spirit arose in his breast. To run back and despatch a neighbour for the engine was the work of a very short time, while he

hastened to the vicarage. In his heart he accused Harker of the catastrophe, so determined to go himself and judge of that worthy's demeanour. He rang the bell quietly, so as to give no hint of his purpose, and when Sally opened the door said—

“Mr. Harker in?”

“Yes. Do you want him badly? He is having supper and won’t care to be disturbed.”

This was a confirmation of his suspicions. Had not Harker refused him the keys? and a layman who refused the custody of the keys to a clerk was capable of any crime. So, darting by Sally, he went into the kitchen and found Harker just filling his pipe. Of course he had just come in, so Higgs thought, and blurted out—

“Come and help undo your work, and when that is done consider yourself under arrest.”

Harker laughed heartily, and when he had finished said, “What’s the matter, Mr. Higgs? Been to the Feathers to-night?”

“I suppose you don’t know the church is on fire, and have lost the keys, of course?”

Harker’s face became in an instant grave and stern. “Conscience pricks him,” thought Higgs.

His auditor jumped up and ran upstairs, candle in hand, for the keys, which hung in the library. Calling on Higgs to follow, the two men proceeded to the scene of action with hurried steps. Arrived there, they found quite a little crowd, who shortly gave a cheer as the little engine hove in sight, drawn by twelve volunteers.

"Any water near?" said Harker, who at once assumed the command in virtue of his being the only person with his wits about him.

"Yes; there is a tank sunk at the foot of the first buttress," said Higgs.

"Lay it open, and get the hose in."

This was done in a very short time, and would have been done more quickly, but for the throng of helpers, who impeded one another. Harker opened the door, and, taking the nozzle of the hose, projected a stream into the church. It soon hissed as it touched the fire.

"That's right. Now, forward, one person and myself," said Harker, decisively.

A stalwart volunteer pushed forward, and the two men went through the smoke. It was not yet blinding or very dangerous. The pulpit shone in

the distance like a red beacon, and the length of hose was soon at an end, but the stream of water reached the fiery mass of burning wood. Telling his companion to run back and urge the pumping, which had begun to slacken, Harker directed it on the charred wood and embers. After a little time, he said—

“The fire is out, but we must keep on with the water; it may blaze up elsewhere.”

Just then the water was exhausted, and the danger not being over, buckets were procured and passed from hand to hand. This was a longer process. Harker still directed the work with untiring energy. At length the windows were opened to let out the smoke, and the church was saved for the present from further injury.

Police-constable Pomeroy arrived shortly afterwards. He had finished his beat, which only comprised five or six villages and the farms adjacent to them. It certainly was odd he could not be everywhere at once. The police are never present when wanted, so runs the popular idea; but there are reasons for most things, if we look far enough afield. Harker gave the building into his charge, and re-

paired to the Feathers. He found Mrs. Tyack. John had gone to assist, so he said—look on, as his enemies averred.

“I want a good saddle horse in five minutes, Mrs. Tyack.”

“Then you can’t have it,” said Mrs. Tyack, who resented Harker’s desertion of the accommodation of the Feathers.

“I am a police officer and shall go to the stable and take one.”

“You can if you like. There are none there.”

Bates the miller now returned to look after his unfinished glass of punch, and on Harker’s urgent entreaty promised the loan, for a consideration, of his pony and trap, as well as a boy to drive, who knew the short cuts to Salisbury, the nearest telegraph station. While the trap was being got ready, Harker went to the church again and walked round it. His practised eye at once detected the forced window. Telling Police-constable Pomeroy to keep an eye upon it, he returned, entered the vehicle, and was lost in the darkness.

“Drive fast and I’ll give you a sovereign,” he said to the boy.

"Honour bright, Mr. Harker?"

"Here are five shillings at once," said he, giving two bright half-crowns.

"But how about the beast? Master will go on if he's lathered much."

"Take your time coming back."

The pony, or more properly cob, felt the half-crowns in the shape of a cut that roused his energies. Hedges, cottages, and hamlets flew by, till, reaching Salisbury, Harker was enabled to send off a message to the Cedars. Feeling he could do no more, he sought the principal inn, and by a judicious use of the silver key opened the stable door and procured a fresh beast. He was driven back nearly as quickly as he had gone.

Higgs was a great man in Littledale. The fire had given him an importance in the eyes of his fellows that dwellers in larger communities can hardly conceive possible, and he was escorted in solemn procession to the Feathers.

"I expect, Jacob, you won't be very long before you let us know all about this?" said Spears.

Higgs looked sagacious and solemn, but remarked, as if in a casual way, "I guess Pomeroy

and Gilbert will have a job before long that will frighten some of you."

His auditors were silent, so, pleased with the effect of his evidence, he continued, "Can any one call Pomeroy or Gilbert? They are both good officers."

Police-constable Gilbert had relieved Police-constable Pomeroy, who, finding sleep out of the question and scenting liquor, was at that moment just outside. He was soon called, and Higgs continued, "I wish to speak with you in private, Mr. Pomeroy; it is of importance."

"Certainly, Mr. Higgs."

"A glass of brandy and water for Mr. Pomeroy," said Higgs.

The glass was produced. A sympathizer paid for it. No doubt Higgs forgot it; genius is often above trifles of detail.

The two adjourned to the bar-parlour and shut the door. The glasses were still on the table, and the rings from the wet bottoms described a pattern of great eccentricity and novelty. Two or three jugs and the empty bowl still remained. Higgs sat down, and drew up his chair. The officer drew

his, in all humility, a little further off, scratched his head, and tried to look wise.

“Pomeroy, this is a bad job ;” and Higgs sighed, giving emphasis by a rather deep draught from a glass of his own.

“Never knew a worse case in my life, all through my experience ;” and Pomeroy looked as profound as it was possible for him to do. He still remembered with pride the great egg case of Farmer Bates. Four years before, when the farmer had lost fifteen eggs in one night—the thieves had left the broken shells and walked off with the insides of the eggs—he had investigated the case for ten days, when the reappearance of a strayed hen and thirteen chickens had solved the mystery.

“Yes, Pomeroy ; there is a deep mystery here. A stranger has been in the town. I suspected him from the first. As for Mr. Clark and Mr. Pod, he deceived them good gentlemen, but he couldn’t deceive me ;” and Higgs shut his eyes and shook his head.

“I had better take notes, Mr. Higgs, of your statement,” said the officer, producing a dirty piece of paper and a pencil that was incapable of producing a mark.

“Very true. Have you got it down yet?”

“Yes, all I want.”

“Well, a man named Harker——”

Pomeroy started and looked puzzled.

“Although only left ‘lokey tenans’——

This phrase Higgs had fancied he heard the vicar make use of on one occasion, and now thought this a good opportunity for bringing it in. The officer was duly impressed; he didn’t understand it, of course, but that only the more excited his admiration of Jacob’s learning and acumen.

“Yes, although only left ‘lokey tenans,’ he refused me the custody of the keys of the church on two occasions—twice, on my word.”

“And what had he to say in his defence, sir?”

“Nothing, except that I could write to the Rev. Cyrus Clark if I chose.”

“And did you, Mr. Higgs?”

“No, I did not; I felt too hurt.”

The door softly opened, and Mrs. Tyack, with pardonable curiosity, gently inserted her head.

“And what other suspicious circumstances have you brought to light besides?”

“Noth—that is to say, nothing that had better

be mentioned at present ; ” and Higgs shook his head gravely.

“ I ’ ll keep my eye on him , ” said Pomeroy , putting back the dirty piece of paper , having first feigned to look at imaginary notes to refresh his memory , also replacing the incapable pencil in his pocket .

Scenting no more brandy and water , Pomeroy went home , and the various idlers dropped off to give further attention to the mystery by sleeping on it . But Higgs went to the church again , and looked at the still steaming and smoking pulpit with deep attention . Police-constable Gilbert had quietly sat down in one of the unwetted pews , and was dropping off to sleep , but Jacob’s entrance aroused him .

“ Well , Mr. Higgs , any fresh information ? ”

“ What time did Harker go back to the vicarage ? ” said Jacob , answering one question by asking another .

“ Not at all . He went to Salisbury , and borrowed Miller Bates’s trap and pony to go ; his boy drove . ”

“ And did you allow him ? ”

“ Why not, Mr. Higgs ? ”

“ Because most likely the boy is murdered by this time and Harker miles away.”

“ Lor’, how you startle any one ! ”

Higgs smiled a smile of superior wisdom and penetration, and so departed. The night was wearing away, and Jacob went home, bidding Mrs. Higgs call him early. The grey dawn crept over the east; the air was raw and chilly. By-and-by the grey grew warmer in colour, and at length it changed to a bright gold, lit by the rays of the sun, as, running his appointed course, he began to ascend the heavens.

The maid of all work at the Feathers had evaded the troublesome operation of undressing and dressing by a short nap on the kitchen settle, and was lighting the fire under the large pot to warm some water, when a carriage and pair drew up in front. She went out and found Silas Pod, very anxious and very weary, feeing the driver, who, to her great surprise, was their own man with their own horses, very tired, with heads hanging down and evidently dead beat.

Silas Pod dragged his weary limbs to the

church, and found the active and intelligent officer keeping a diligent watch on a bed made in one of pews from the cushions that were left dry. Silas would have been ignorant of his presence but for his snoring. The officer, on being roused, informed Pod it was a sad case; that Harker had been more than suspected of setting fire to the church, had run off and murdered the boy who lived at the mill, and stolen the horse and trap; but the offender, he added, would soon be brought back and most likely hanged. Amusement at this sensational romance kept Silas in a continual state of silent laughter. On further inquiries, he found the body had not yet been discovered, because no doubt the criminal had so skilfully hidden it.

The walk in the fresh morning air refreshed Silas considerably, and from the church he went to the vicarage. After one or two pulls at the bell, Sally Grimes opened the door. Silas asked for Harker, who, Sally informed him, was lying down for a little while. Bidding Sally not disturb him, he asked for a can of hot water, and took a warm bath, after which he sat down to breakfast, which Sally had contrived to get during his ablutions.

Harker joined him, and, at Silas's invitation, assisted in the disappearance of the eatables. Hunger being appeased and hot coffee having refreshed them, Silas asked Harker for an account of the night's proceedings.

"You see, Mr. Pod, I have a lot to tell you; would you like to take notes as I go along?"

"No, no; go on with your story."

"Yesterday, after breakfast, I thought I would give a look round, when I see young Jones creeping about, so I followed cautiously."

"Right; go on."

"He went over hedges and ditches till he came to a lane, where he joined a lady. I ran to a gap in the hedge, and looked through and saw it was Miss Maunder."

"Well, what did he say?"

"I didn't hear; but they went on in the direction of a little broken-down cottage, kept by a woman mostly called Sally; so, thinking I couldn't hear much else, I came back and wrote you a letter, which you missed. It will be delivered at the Cedars this morning, I expect. Jones don't call at the house, so the young woman must be

carrying on unknown to Mr. Elgood and her brothers. As nothing seemed doing, I stopped here to tea and supper. After supper the bell rang, and Higgs told me the church was on fire. We soon put it out; but some one has got, I found, a window off its hinges and a bar wrenched out. So I took the opportunity to look at the safes and found them all right; they hadn't been tampered with. The fire was in the pulpit; it's almost burnt away."

"How did you telegraph?"

"The landlord of the Feathers hadn't got any cattle, so I hired Miller Bates's trap and came back in a Salisbury one."

Silas laughed, and Harker looked inquiringly.

"They say in Littledale that you stole the trap and pony, finishing by cutting the boy's throat and hiding the body."

"Then the young beggar isn't come back yet, I suppose?"

"We had better go and search; there may be a clue if we look at once, before these bumpkins have made a bigger mess of it."

"You don't think they will take me up on suspicion?" said Harker, laughing.

"Shouldn't wonder if they don't try. I shall expect to be well paid for conducting the defence ; " and both laughed as they put on their hats and went out.





CHAPTER XVII.

"HARKER, you can go and have a look, and I will call on Matthew and stop that little game once and for ever."

It had been daylight some time. Jane Bright had descended and brushed up the kitchen, had got the breakfast things on a tray, and was about to go into the parlour, when Silas knocked. Jane answered the door. The shop was only partially opened, and the door leading to the parlour was shut.

"Mr. Elgood in?"

"Not down yet, sir, though he usually is by this time. Mr. James and Mr. Robert are in the shop. I'm just going to dust the parlour," said Jane, fearing the dust would produce an unfavourable impression on Silas.

"Never mind, I'll step in. Go and call Mr. Elgood at once ; I want to see him."

"Yes, sir."

Silas went into the shop and saw James and Robert, who invariably, on commencing business in the morning, entered it from the passage. They were talking and laughing merrily.

"Good morning, young gentlemen. Shall I go into the parlour ? I want to see Matthew particularly."

"Certainly, sir. Shall I open the door ?"

"No, thank you ; I will go in and wait," said Pod, with his hand on the door. Opening it, he advanced a pace, saying, "I didn't think you were down, Matthew," but suddenly stopped. The figure in the armchair was still, and returned no cheering greeting. Silas turned white, and quickly called out, "Robert, run for Doctor Black ; I don't feel well. Quick ! don't stop a second ! bring him with you. Great heavens !

Robert vanished, and James kindly came towards Silas, who waved him back. James, nothing daunted, said, "Shall I get you a chair ?" and taking the handle from his nerveless hand, went in.

There sat Matthew, and James at the first glance saw nothing amiss, but in an instant the white cheeks and dark mark round the mouth opened his eyes.

"Clara—I say, Robert, quick! quick! Matthew has fainted again!"

"Silence! He has not."

James looked at Pod inquiringly; the magnitude of the evil was too great to be realized all at once, but a look of sorrow and terror swept over Pod's face. He took Matthew's hand and pressed it to his lips in silence and fear; it was stone cold. The worst came home to him, and, turning away with his face to the wall, he burst into tears. Silas suffered the surcharged heart to relieve itself, but, by an effort calming himself, James said—

"How shall we tell them, Mr. Pod? He will never come back to us any more."

Just then a cheery voice said, "Where is my patient, Robert? Why, he is sitting up all right."

"Hush!" said Pod, and pointed to the silent figure.

Doctor Black at once knew it was all over, but

took a mirror from a side table and held it to the lips of the dead. The two brothers gazed in speechless hope, if hope it could be called. Robert was mingling his tears with those of James. The doctor, who, though used to scenes of suffering and death, was deeply affected, turned to Silas and said—

“ Some one must tell their sister—or does she know it yet ? ”

James and Robert in their agony turned a look of entreaty to Silas and the doctor. The door was suddenly opened, and Jane appeared with tear-stained face.

“ Oh, Mr. James and Mr. Robert, Miss Clara’s gone. Her bed hasn’t been slept in. Here is a note she left.”

“ Too late ! too late ! ” groaned Pod.

Jane, as if turned to stone, stood still and motionless ; the doctor gently led her outside the door. There are depths of trouble and grief that defy description, too sacred to be exhibited in mere reproduction. Words fail to convey any idea of the heaviness and sorrow that brooded over the bereft and bereaved household. The wild and pas-

sionate cries that wring the heart can only be understood and adequately pitied by Omnipotence ; they are often harshly judged by fellow-sinners. Only on the eternal shore shall the great mystery be explained. There we shall see clearly, not "as through a glass darkly ;" there shall the great purposes of that Spirit which rules the spheres be revealed to the adoring eyes of His creatures. We can take the down of the butterfly, but cannot tell why it is so beautifully made ; we can survey in wonder and astonishment the form of the striped tiger that bears away its victim ; we can realize the serpent that strikes its deadly blow in the shape of an envenomed wound. These are only of the natural body. But mental wounds are worse. The pain of separation by the hand of death is hard to bear ; but the mortal wound, that a loved one has habitually deceived us, cuts deeper in that beautiful thing, the human soul—the most beautiful thing we can realize this side of the grave. Vast tracts of country denuded of their inhabitants to make a hunting ground of selfish pleasure may arrest the human eye, but in the process of a new and better future they may be

re-peopled, and resound again with the sound of labour; the cottager's garden and the waving harvest may cover the desolate waste. But the stricken soul can never bloom again in its full life and beauty, till we reach that place where sorrow is unknown. Like the healed wound, it leaves a scar.

The shop grew dark, and the brothers looked up, even in their grief, to learn the cause. Jane was putting up the shutters. It was the one effort she could make to shield their gaping wounds from the curiosity of the outside world, if only for a time. Silence and darkness brooded over the house smitten by death and desertion.

Jonathan Harker went to the church and searched the ruins with patience and an eye quickened by long training to investigations of the sort. He found in the ashes a blackened hammer, and in the aisle a dead bat. It also struck him that the fire must have been fed at first by some foreign substance, else it would not have blazed so fiercely or have been put out so easily. A careful re-examination showed a charred piece of paper, which had a slightly fetid smell. He now saw the whole circumstances as clearly as if he had

been there. A messenger informed him that Mr. Pod was at the vicarage, and would be glad of his company as soon as he could go, which he immediately did. He found Silas, with very red eyes and a suspicious unsteadiness of voice, seated in the library. Silas drank a glass of wine, and desired Harker to tell him what traces he had discovered of the origin of the fire.

" You see, sir, I have it quite clear it was an accident."

" How did you learn it ? "

" I found the remains of a hammer, a dead bat, and a piece of paper. The bat flew in at the empty window, and as these creatures always fly to the light, perhaps it knocked the candle down and frightened the party. They were busy, but had got everything they came for. There was a hole in the bottom of the pulpit ; but the sides were burnt in some places only, while in others, from the straightness of the grain, they were merely charred, for fire never burns with the grain of wood. The piece of paper had been used for carrying a candle, as it smelt of tallow, and was most likely thrown down in the hurry of running away."

“ Why running away ? ”

“ Because the pews were scratched under the window that was broken open.”

“ It may have been done in getting in ? ”

“ The scratches run to the window and not away from it.”

“ Clara Maunder has eloped.”

“ Then Jones did it, that’s certain ; at least, it may be. Better not be too quick in telling every one.”

“ Matthew Elgood is dead, Harker.”

“ How, sir ? ” said Harker, his face full of real horror.

“ Died in his chair of heart disease.”

“ Of course, there will be an inquest. So much the better.”

“ In what way ? ”

“ People’s heads will be full of the inquest, and then we can work our discovery on the quiet.”

“ There will be an inquiry about the church ? ”

“ Then let Pomeroy and Gilbert tell all they know, which isn’t much.”

“ But about poor Elgood ? ”

“ It is shocking, I know ; but time is very short

and eternity very long. If it wasn't for that idea, all detectives would doubt even the goodness of the Almighty."

This was said by Jonathan with a firm tone of conviction, very different from his manner when narrating a successful discovery. Pod sighed and said—

"I leave it to you to-day, Harker; I don't feel fit for anything."

Harker nodded. Finding no further orders were forthcoming, he went away. Silas remained at the table in deep thought and sorrow. He had not known much of Matthew; but there are some sterling characters that leave their impress on the surrounding items of mortality. The diamond cuts most things; others, if worthy of the process, it polishes to a greater and more enduring brightness than they could attain of themselves.

Jacob Higgs was not one whit put out by Harker's return; and when further inquiry showed the boy had arrived, he still consoled himself by saying he was not deceived so easily as other people, and that it was all a blind on Jonathan's part. If Jacob was in error on one point,

Jonathan was on another. Doctor Black gave a certificate, and there was no inquest on Matthew's body.

Joshua Smith, as the day advanced, looked out for Maurice's arrival. He sent Harold to his lodgings in the morning to inquire about him. Jones's landlord was quite willing to tell all he knew, which was to the effect that Mr. Jones was in bed and asleep ; he had been to the door, and it was locked, but he could hear him snoring very heavily. Harold returned with the news to his father, who said to the office boy—

“ Go and see the carriage is ready for Mr. St. John punctually. It is past ten o'clock.”

The boy departed, but soon returned saying no carriage was ordered for eleven o'clock that morning, and Mr. Tyack was coming over to see Mr. Smith. John arrived almost as soon as the messenger.

“ Cattle's dead beat, sir, after the journey last night.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

John looked solemn, and, shutting the door of the inner office, said hardly above a whisper, “ It's all right about the election, I hope ? ”

Joshua looked frightened ; he thought recent events had turned John's brain, and in apparently a careless manner caught hold of the ruler as a weapon of defence.

"I sent you an order last night."

"Quite right ; here it is ;" and John produced the order.

"It has been altered and tampered with, Tyack."

"Oh no. Mr. Jones said I was to be cautious, but we understood one another ;" and John looked knowing.

"I don't understand you in the least. What story have you got hold of ?"

"Why, Mr. Jones told my wife there was a county election coming off, and that the carriage was wanted at ten o'clock."

"Well, where is it ?"

"In the stable. I sent it out at ten last night, as you ordered."

"I didn't," said Joshua, impatiently.

"And perhaps you didn't tell me not to charge the freeholders for liquor ?"

"No, I did not, most emphatically."

“Mr. Jones said so.”

“Jones is a rascal. You can make him pay you; I shan’t. I never gave any order at all.”

John opened his eyes to their full extent.

“Then you didn’t send him to Salisbury last night?”

“No, I tell you. He went on his own business.”

“Mr. Pod came back in the carriage.”

“So he may have done; it’s nothing to me. Get a carriage—I ordered one for eleven this morning—and make Jones pay for the one last night.”

“He didn’t come back.”

“What?”

“Yes, he didn’t come back.”

“I tell you he did. My son has been to his lodgings, and he is there fast asleep.”

“What had I better do, Mr. Smith?”

“Get the carriage I ordered, and send it to Stratton Manor. Mr. Gabriel and his son Edward are coming here by two o’clock at latest. It is important.”

“And about Jones?”

" Go for the police and burst the door open ; he is no clerk of mine after this rascality."

John sighed and departed. Two fresh horses were borrowed of a neighbouring farmer, and the carriage was despatched. Pomeroy's aid having been invoked, John and he started for Jones's house, accompanied by Jacob Higgs. As they went along, they met Harker, who volunteered to go with them.

" Do you think Jones is really there ? " said Harker to Pomeroy.

" Best be quiet. Anything you say will be taken down and may be used against you," said Pomeroy, solemnly.

Harker laughed and was silent. Thrice they demanded admittance, but no answer was returned. Pomeroy then applied his shoulder and burst the door open. A scene of confusion met their eyes. The room was all disarranged, and Sally snoring on the bed, but the talking of the men and the noise soon roused her. She started up half-awake, and said, in a shrill, cracked voice—

" I didn't steal them. He gave 'em me ; he did indeed, gentlemen."

" You had better tell us all you know at once," said Harker, who saw Sally's head was not yet quite clear.

" I shan't. Get out! It isn't your room; it's Mr. Jones's."

" You had better show us what he gave you," said Pomeroy.

" The money is mine, and I don't intend to give it up."

" You needn't make all that fuss over a sovereign," said Harker, with a view to gathering some information.

" It's thirty pounds, all in notes."

" If you don't let me take the number of the notes, I shall search you," said Pomeroy.

" We won't take them away for the present, only show them to us," said Harker, soothingly.

Sally looked like a wild beast at bay, but, seeing no signs of relenting, she slowly took out of her pocket the six pieces of worthless paper. All the men laughed so long and heartily, that Sally grew even more angry.

" Better go back and tell Mr. Smith," said Harker. He wished to have a little private conversation with Sally alone.

The other three went off to Joshua's office, and in their amusement and excitement forgot that Harker was left master of the field. Sally, having rearranged her dress, restored the notes to her pocket, and was making preparations to go, when Harker said—

“ You had company yesterday, Sally ? ”

“ If I had, what then, Mr. Harker ? ” and Sally looked defiance.

“ If you will tell me, Sally, what they said, I will give you a sovereign.”

Sally's eyes sparkled, but she remained silent. Harker had laughed at her treasures.

“ It is not very comfortable in jail, Sally ; nothing to drink there,” said Harker, suggestively.

“ Well, I wasn't there when they called.”

“ If you weren't, how did you get here ? ”

“ Can't tell, Mr. Harker.”

“ Yes, you can ; ” and Harker skilfully balanced a sovereign on his finger. Avarice overcame Sally's reticence.

“ Jones persuaded Miss Maunder to run away with him.”

“ Then you listened at the door ? ”

“ No, I didn’t ; I was behind the bed. Miss Clara didn’t know I was there.”

“ Or Jones, of course ? ”

“ No, not till after.”

“ Thank you, Sally. And he gave you the money not to tell ? ”

Sally was silent.

“ Well, Sally, you have put your foot in it. Miss Clara isn’t twenty-one yet, and you’ll have to go to jail for aiding and abetting.”

“ Oh, Mr. Harker ! ” and Sally began to cry.

“ Do you know why I laughed just now ? ”

“ No, I don’t.”

“ I’ll tell you ; those pieces of paper are worth nothing.”

“ You want me to give them to you ? ”

“ Wouldn’t have them for a gift,” said Harker, decisively.

“ Oh, Mr. Harker, what can I do ? ”

“ Come to the vicarage and tell Mr. Pod all Jones said, if you don’t want to be locked up.”

“ I’ll come, Mr. Harker. How much shall I get ? ”

"Can't say. If you tell *all* the truth, you'll be out of the scrape, not else ;" and the pair went out.

Silas, aroused by Harker and Sally's arrival, with a very little exercise of skill extracted from Sally all that she knew, but he felt more cast down than ever. Clara's future looked very black. How were they to be traced in the great wilderness of London ? Harker took a more cheerful view. He remarked—

" You see, sir, we have the address of Mr. Green. There's more to be made out of that yet."

" Jones has gone off, swindled me out of my money, and left things worse than ever."

" There ain't much to be done here, sir. You'd better stay, and I'll go to London. If I am wanted you can telegraph to me at my address. I'd better go at once, before Higgs and Pomeroy have got any more maggots in their brains. I might be detained, and time is precious."

" Very well. Here is Mr. Starks's address ; he apparently saw more and further than any one else, and he was at a distance."

" 'All's well that ends well.' The game ain't

played out yet. I owe Jones one, and I mean to pay him."

Jonathan Harker left for London before mid-day. He walked a couple of miles, and then got a lift in a cart to Salisbury, which he left by the next London train.





CHAPTER XVIII.

HENRY ST. JOHN THOMPSON, Cyrus, and Mary sat up talking, after Silas's departure, till nature reasserted her rights and they retired for a few hours' repose. The breakfast the next morning was comparatively a failure; they were each trying to persuade the rest to partake of something, but the meal dragged. There was nothing of the usual sprightliness of the breakfast table; the cheery spirit was absent and could not be invoked. The postman walked up the path and left the letters, and a maid brought them in. Two of his letters Henry threw on one side, but the other bore the Littledale postmark, and there was also one from the same place for Cyrus. They both opened them with avidity. The countenances of the two presented a marked difference. Cyrus became

brisk in manner, and pushed his cup for more coffee with cheerful excitement. But Mary took no notice; she was looking at Henry, whose face was overcast and sorrowful in the extreme. Cyrus, absorbed in Matthew's letter of almost invitation, was quite joyous, and cheerfully said, "I will read my letter out." He did so, and as he finished he looked over to Henry, who faintly smiled.

"What is the matter, Henry? Speak. What bad news have you received? Tell me."

Henry tried to refuse; but Mary, who had looked over her husband's shoulder, said, "Cyrus had better read Harker's letter himself."

Cyrus took the paper from Henry's almost nerveless hand, and read the written lines slowly and deliberately. In that short interval a great change came over his face, and in a hollow and constrained tone of voice he said, "What is the date of the two letters? I can't see exactly; my head swims."

Henry compared them. The date of Matthew's was two days before, and Henry looked grave.

"Mr. Elgood's letter was not delivered; it has been delayed," said Mary.

"I see by the postmarks they were posted the same day," said Henry, severely. He began to suspect Matthew of some complicity in the matter.

"Matthew is as open as the day; but the suspicion of Clara is horrible. It cannot be."

"Certainly, without further proof, you cannot suspect her of such a crime. Matthew was arrested on the charge," said Mary, impulsively.

"Well, we will walk into the town, Cyrus, and wait further information on the matter," said Henry. But there was no cheerful sound of hope in his voice; in his mind he clearly condemned her.

Cyrus got up and went out. In the agony of suspense, he felt the companionship of his nearest and dearest friends to be insupportable. The sun seemed darkened, all nature cold and dead. The perspiration stood on his brow in drops that chilled his soul, as he paced the lawn in hopeless misery. This, then, he thought, was the end of all his bright hopes and aspirations; they had passed away like a morning dream. It was too much. Henry and Mary held counsel together. Mary was for anything that roused Cyrus, and her

husband, taking her advice, went out and found him sitting beneath the elms.

“Come, Cyrus, we will go, as I said, into the town. We can telegraph if you like; I wish to do so as well to my stockbroker.”

Cyrus, in a manner devoid of all interest, replied, “Certainly.”

“Come, rouse yourself. It may not be true.”

“But you think it is?”

“If I do, that does not make it so.”

“We shall be late. I am ready to accompany you if you wish.”

Cyrus went in to change his coat. There was a set expression on his face that had gathered force and power. The well-cut mouth assumed a firm and determined look hitherto wanting, and the eyes were more fixed, with a gleam in them that reminded the beholder of the flash of the sword in the hand of the warrior. The social distinctions are so clearly and sharply defined in the country that even Cyrus felt them. To be rejected for a lawyer’s clerk was a thought that continually intruded, adding bitterness to his cup, with a force unsuspected even by himself. The

wave of doubt of every one surged higher and higher; the blacker thoughts of the human heart, which in his gentle and pure life had before been kept at bay, arose with almost relentless force. The man he had known as himself seemed far away, and in its place a soul in arms with itself and society was triumphant; and as the evil thoughts of hate came thicker and faster, he imagined himself deserted and betrayed by all. They gathered with a fiercer head and consistency in the direction of Maurice. The fire of the evil passion of revenge lit up his mind with a lurid glare, like the sulphurous and dark-red flames at the mouth of an iron furnace. As if in a dream, he saw Henry telegraph to his London stock-broker to sell out. He dimly thought of Henry's future, and it increased the tempest. Why should another be rich, and happy in wealth and the love of a good woman, and he himself cast into utter darkness? A wild desire to do something took possession of his breast, but remembering his powerlessness, it burnt with greater fierceness for the repression of his thoughts and feelings. He felt in his abasement and fury that Henry would

be shocked at the words that he might give expression to.

At lunch time he startled both Henry and Mary by abruptly saying, if they had any commissions for London, he would undertake them. Both expressed surprise, but, finding he was not to be moved, Henry said—

“ You had better give me your address. I may want to write.”

“ I will write and let you know; I hardly know where I shall stay yet.”

“ But what are you going for, Cyrus ? ” said Henry. This was exactly what he could hardly tell himself, but answered—

“ I have business to transact.”

The subject was then dropped for the time. After lunch was over Henry followed Cyrus upstairs, and softly closed the door. Cyrus turned fiercely on him and said—

“ Am I a prisoner, then ? ”

“ No, Cyrus, you are not, except to your own dark thoughts, which have locked up the best part of you and it can’t get out.”

“ You are a lawyer by education and can twist

an expression with ingenuity," said Cyrus, with a sneer.

"I have heard that it is not confined to my profession," said Henry, rather sadly. Cyrus was lost to the insinuation, and only thought of the wreck before him. True, the sails were unsplit by the blast, but the undertow had carried away the rudder.

"Well, you have come here——"

"To ask a favour, and I cannot believe my old friend will refuse me."

"What is it?"

"To wait till to-morrow. You or I will get further letters from Silas Pod by the morning post, and, after all, it may be a mistake."

"Was it a mistake on my part that Clara once looked kindly at me out of her honest blue eyes; that when I laid the future hope of my existence at her feet, she repulsed me with scorn and loathing? And what for? A man who deceived her in every point, who must have maligned me and traded on her credulity."

"Well, if she was deceived and you were deceived—what then?"

"My punishment shall fall heavier on his scoundrelly shoulders."

"What an exceedingly interesting case it will be in the police reports! For shame, Cyrus, for shame!"

"I can but feel it like a man," said Cyrus, rather daunted. But the spirit of disappointed hope was not so easily soothed and put aside; it burst out again, as Henry said—

"Has Silas Pod ever told you his story?"

"Yes, he has, and I have never allowed the lust of gain to stand in the way of the dictates of my heart, whatever he may have done."

"What Silas has suffered was in consequence of his own actions; they are the only true causes of remorse. We may feel sorrow for misguided innocence, or honest indignation at duplicity may afflict us for a time, but remorse can only be induced by our own actions, and that is the hardest sting of all to bear in life, believe me, Cyrus."

"You ask me to wait till to-morrow; I will, if I can be of any service."

Henry's conscience felt a twinge as he answered, "You can, indeed. I shall receive by the

same post various vouchers, which I want placed at my bankers, by trustworthy hands, with the least delay possible."

"Then I will remain, in that case, till to-morrow. You can unclose the door; I don't want to run away."

Henry went downstairs, and Cyrus, putting on his hat, walked out. He returned in time for dinner, driven by a certain insensible chain of daily habit to dine at a certain hour. After dinner, Mary went to baby, and the two gentlemen drew up to the dessert. Cyrus, who was a very abstemious man usually, poured out glass after glass of wine, which he tossed off and tried to smack his lips over; but they were dry and feverish, and the attempt was a failure of the most dreary kind. At length, in an abrupt manner, he wished Henry good night, and retired to his room; gaining which, he threw himself on the bed, dressed as he was. His head throbbed, the hand he pressed to his forehead was dry and palsied, and it was not for hours that sleep descended and closed the weary lids.

Next morning the light awoke him; he had

forgotten to draw down his blind, and he lay for a little time in a sort of stupor, wondering what had happened, till a rush of recollections caused him to rise with the aching void still empty in his heart, and the black thoughts held high carnival. "I will not be cajoled again," he thought, "to-day. I will go to London, and in the great wilderness find abstraction, if not oblivion of the past." He looked at his watch ; it was still early, but inaction was impossible. Another walk, which in the ordinary course would have tired him out completely, only added a spur to his intent. With scarcely arranged dress, he sat down to the breakfast table ; he could scarcely swallow a morsel, but a couple of cups of coffee refreshed him. The postman brought the letters. He sat in sullen silence while Henry opened his correspondence. There were only two letters—one from the London stockbroker, which Henry opened first ; the other bore the Littledale postmark, and he shrank from opening it. It was in Silas's handwriting, but very unlike his usual bold, yet studied, caligraphy. However, it must be done, so he opened it. It ran :—

" Littledale.

" DEAR HENRY,

" Matthew Elgood died of heart disease in his chair, quite easily. He will be buried in a day or two. I feel shaken ; he was a very good man, and we get few of them. I suppose Cyrus will stay with you for a day or two. I can't write more, being busy.

" Yours truly,

" SILAS POD."

There was a slip enclosed, which fell out. Cyrus stooped down and picked it up. With a wild cry of hate and rage as he caught the line of writing, he dashed into the passage for his hat, and walked off down the path in the direction of the railway station. Mary and Henry looked at one another in consternation. The piece of paper had fluttered in the air, and finally descended on the table. Mary caught it up and read it, putting her handkerchief to her eyes. Henry took it from her hand as she dropped it, and ran his eye along the scrap :—

" Clara Maunder eloped with Maurice Jones last

night, it is supposed. She is not to be found. Most likely she is gone to London with him. Keep dark for the present, if possible.

“S. P.”

But Mary recovered herself, and said with quiet determination, “Henry, dear, overtake him; he is not himself. Go with him.”

“But I can’t leave just now; there is yourself to be thought of.”

“He would, if it were you, and leave all for your sake.”

Henry went and saddled his horse more quickly than ever before, telling the man to follow on foot and bring back the beast, and, with one kiss on his wife’s hot cheeks, was gone.

Oh, woman, while thou art left, brightest and best relic of a sinless time, Paradise may be forgotten for a while! The idolatry of the Madonna in the dark ages was hardly a wicked one, for it shed a faint, if faulty, light on a world of violence and crime.



CHAPTER XIX.

GABRIEL ST. JOHN, Esq., and his son Edward drove into Littledale, to the offices of Joshua Smith. They were received by Harold, who showed them into his father's private office, where they remained closeted for a long time. The sinews of war were found to be more difficult to raise than Joshua Smith expected. A tide of prosperity had induced a crop of loans to bankrupt foreign governments at extraordinary interest, and people looked down on four to five per cent. as unworthy of their attention; at least, so he told Gabriel. Gabriel would not encumber his estates unless Joshua went halves in the risk, which, to tell the truth, he was very ready to do, the title being so clear and distinctly in the male line; but at each advance Joshua asked higher terms. Gabriel did not contest the matter. If

they won, Joshua's demands would be but a flea-bite in the estates ; if they lost, Gabriel had, *sub rosa*, disposed of one of his estates upon an agreement of cash down in twenty-four hours after notice, which would enable him to live abroad in comfort, if not in luxury.

Joshua had asked for the custody of the deeds of the whole of Gabriel's property—"as usual, you know, in affairs of this sort." Gabriel answered by reminding Joshua that he himself had stated the agreement to be unusual, and whether it was so or not, he was not going to hand over his deeds in that manner. Of course, Joshua would hold the deeds of the farms mortgaged, but not the others. The lawyer was rather puzzled, but being unaware of Gabriel's provision for a retreat in safety, if not honour, should they lose the day, he dismissed the matter as the whim of an obstinate old man. Various papers were signed and sealed to Joshua's satisfaction, as far as they went, when Edward St. John, who fretted at the delay and was anxious to have another interview with Maurice, and Clara as well, if possible, remarked in a casual way—

"Where is Jones to-day, Mr. Smith?"

"Gone from here. I have discharged him."

"What for?"

"Tampering with an order I gave him for your carriage."

"In what way, Mr. Smith?"

"Having it out last night to go to Salisbury with. He has not returned yet."

"What may be the cause of his sudden flight?"

"I don't know and don't care. I think he was entangled with some girl here. The driver says he went alone, but Clara Mauder has disappeared."

Edward started to his feet and uttered an inarticulate cry.

"Are you ill, Edward?" said Gabriel with concern.

"No, only surprised, father," he said, trying to appear at his ease, but with small success.

Joshua looked at him with a glance of curiosity and interest. Edward saw it, and it prevented his making any further indiscreet disclosures.

"Yes; and, now that we have settled our business and I can think of other things, there was a fire at Littledale Church last night. I suppose

there will be a magisterial inquiry, but the registers are all right."

"I will go and look at it. Would you like to come, father?"

"No, thank you, Edward; I will go and sit in a private room at the Feathers. You can join me there, and we will return to Stratton."

"You'll take a little lunch first?" interposed Joshua.

"No, thank you. Another day, perhaps, Mr. Smith."

Father and son departed together; but they soon separated, and Edward bent his steps towards the church. Gabriel soon reached the Feathers, and ordered a private room, on pretence of wanting to give orders. He sent for the driver, who came in looking somewhat frightened. He knew Gabriel was a magistrate, and his ideas of a magistrate's power were unbounded.

"So you went to Salisbury last night, John?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Jones went; and Mr. Pod, seeing me, engaged me for the return journey."

"Mr. Jones went last night—at what time?"

"Ten o'clock, and alone, sir; quite alone."

Gabriel suspected something from the reiteration of "quite alone," so he said, "Take a glass of wine, John;" and that being swallowed, remarked with a knowing smile, "And what did the lady say when they got out at Salisbury?"

"Nothing, sir. Miss Maunder was very quiet, and said nothing at all."

"You told me Jones went alone, and now you say that Clara Maunder went with him?"

"Did I, sir?"

"Yes, you did. I am a magistrate, and if you don't tell me all the truth it will be the worse for you," said Gabriel, sternly.

"I don't know anything. Mr. Jones asked me not to tell, and that is all."

"He paid you, I suppose. You can go;" and John shuffled out of the room.

Gabriel smiled. A vague rumour had reached him about Clara and Edward, and he thought it was all for the best that the girl was gone. He suspected from Joshua's unwillingness to speak there was something of importance concealed, but on reflection came to the conclusion that Jones had been confederated with the girl all along, and that

she had purloined the papers. He had lost money in reclaiming them, but he could prosecute at a future time and recover the loss. It would have been more annoying if his son had got entangled ; there were always complications when women were mixed up in an affair, and it was, perhaps, all for the best. If not, he could do nothing at present. Jones was gone, no one knew where, and he must wait for further intelligence.

Edward went to the church. The floor was being cleaned and the charred pieces of wood removed, but the pulpit remained the same as when the fire was extinguished. He looked at the safes containing the registers, and felt satisfied on one point—they were untouched. Besides, he had certified copies of all he wanted. The origin of the fire still remained a mystery. Pomeroy was still on duty, but in a very languid way. He brightened up when he saw Edward St. John, and hoped for a tip, but could tell nothing except that a window had been removed. Edward walked round the edifice, and looked at the pulpit, the door of which had been taken down, disclosing the burnt and charred inside. Upon looking at it again, he

fancied he had seen something like it before—but where? he asked himself: the pulpit had never previously given him such an idea; and sitting down in one of the free seats that commanded a good view, he thought, “I have seen something like it, though I never saw a burnt pulpit before,” and he strove to grasp the evanescent image. He passed in review all his varied experiences, but they failed to help him. “The papers I have found give no clue?” he thought, and repeated the substance of them without success, till he came to the sentence, “Let him carefully see that Littledale Church is undisturbed, and the pulpit——” He started: “Of course,” and the rude sketch in sympathetic ink recurred to him meaningly. The cross in the centre, what did that mean? Bounding up the aisle, and thereby astonishing into wakefulness Pomeroy, who had relapsed into a state of semi-slumber, he went up the stairs and found a hole in the structure exactly where he did not wish to find it, at least open. His hands trembled with eagerness, and he felt all round the inside, but nothing rewarded his search. Again and again he plunged in his hands. At

length he felt something, and drew it out. It was a turn-screw, charred, it is true, but still easily recognizable. The meaning of Jones's strange manner and confused way of speaking after he had seen the rude sketch was quite clear to him now. With Edward, to think was to act. He went across to Joshua's office, and asked for him, and was admitted to his presence.

" You remember coming to Stratton the other day with Jones, Mr. Smith ? "

" Yes, I do," said Joshua, rather shortly. The name of Jones was not pleasant to his ears.

" Can you recollect any conversation that you had with him while going home."

" No ; that is to say, yes. We conversed, oddly enough, about the father of the late vicar, and I casually remarked that your grandfather had been a good friend to him, and largely contributed towards the restoration and rebuilding of the church."

" What took the conversation in that direction ? "

" I don't know," said Joshua, again rather shortly. He did not fancy being cross-examined ; few lawyers do. Besides, he saw there was some-

thing up he had not been enlightened about, and felt angry accordingly.

"Good day, thank you, Mr. Smith;" and Edward was gone.

Joshua repented his shortness of speech, and rose to call him back; but hearing his retreating footsteps sounding very plainly in the outer office, he thought it odd, and wondered they did so when the door was shut. He went into the outer office still wondering. Harold sat at James's desk and looked up inquiringly. As he did so he half turned round, and his arm swept the wall at the side and moved a file of papers. Joshua's eyes opened wide in astonishment and horror; he saw a hole bored in the wall. The mystery of so easily hearing from one office to another was now explained, and he trembled in spirit. No wonder Jones had gone off so easily. What secrets did he not possess, having overheard the most private of Joshua's conferences! and it crossed his mind in a very unpleasant manner that Maurice seemed to know a great many things of a private nature when asked about any transaction. It had often astonished him before; now it did so no longer.

Returning to his private office, he tore up a letter he had nearly finished for the *Hue and Cry*. Jones was not safe to meddle with in a hostile way. People wondered he spoke so kindly of the absent, which was not his usual custom; but in his heart he thought, "Only let me catch you tripping ever so little, and I will make you pay, Maurice Jones, dearly for this," and the expression of Joshua's face was not pleasant to look at.

The private room at the Feathers was beginning to get tiresome to solitary Gabriel, who wished for Edward's return, that he might impart the news he had extracted from John at dinner, and the sound of his son's footsteps was welcome in the extreme. As soon as he was seated Gabriel began—

"That girl we had as servant at the Manor has gone off with Jones, so we shan't see them any more. I'm sorry I had any dealings with him. Of course she abstracted the papers he sold us at such an exorbitant price."

"Worse than that. Listen, father: the fire at the church was on purpose."

"What then? We shan't have to pay for it."

"You remember the paper we found in the secret place in the drawing-room?"

"Yes. What of that?"

"There was a rude sketch on it, and we showed it to Smith and his clerk Jones."

"Yes, yes. Well?"

"You remember Jones looked very queer when he saw it?"

"He never saw ink like that before, very likely."

"He saw a good deal deeper than any one else."

"How so?"

"As I went to the church the pulpit door was off its hinges, and I fancied I had seen something like it before, but couldn't tell where. At last I remembered the sentence about Littledale Church being kept, and 'the pulpit of the priest shall stand a memorial of trust.'"

"Yes; go on."

"And I saw that the cross in the sketch referred to the centre of the pulpit. I went

and put my hand down, and found an empty space.”

“Very likely; that’s nothing.”

“But I found a bent screw-driver, which had been used to tear up the boards, all burnt and charred, but still to be recognized.”

Gabriel’s face became rigid and ashy white. He remembered the warning at the end of the paper only too well now; he had despised it before.

“That villain Jones has had them, and we are at his mercy, my boy.”

Edward’s courage rose with the danger and difficulty.

“Not quite so bad, father. He can only sell the papers, and we must outbid the other side.”

“He may ask half the estate.”

“He may ask for a good deal, but the question is what he will get, or rather what it will pay us to give for them.”

“But the others may bid.”

“So they may; but Jones will only deal with the faulty side, because he will have a pull that

way. If they disprove our case, he will come to us ; if they don't, he won't."

" I don't see exactly."

" I will explain it again, father. If they are of vital importance, he will come to us pretty soon. He has a smattering of law ; he must have acquired that, and I will deal with him. Perhaps we shall get them cheaper than you think."

" How, Edward ? "

" Never mind ; I know."

" No violence. Recollect that can't be hushed up in England."

" No ; but the girl he ran away with was an old acquaintance of mine, you know, and she and I may deal."

" Edward, they may be married."

" Certainly, father ; I said nothing against it. I hope they are, and he is getting tired of her, or she of him. Either would do ;" and Edward laughed unpleasantly.

The father and son were careful not to look one another straight in the face. " Let Us make man in Our own image ;" and the soul contem-

plating evil cannot look at even the image with steadfast gaze. There is no surer sign of intended wickedness than an eye that avoids that of even fellow-men. The passing pang of remorse, and vague idea of a better and higher aim in life, that were once awakened in Gabriel's breast by his dead son's letter were quite extinguished ; the lamp of love had expired for want of oil. The bond forged and riveted between the two men that day was one of social convenience and similar interests ; the golden link of affection and mutual esteem was lost for ever, never to be renewed. So evil thoughts spread their dark wings exultingly, shutting out the bright sunlight of truth. Henceforth they would wander pursuing the *ignis fatuus* bred in the pestilent marshes of selfishness, lust, and greed.

When driving from Stratton in the morning, their conversation had been of the weather, the crops, and their neighbours ; but the almost silent ride home was only relieved by execrations at the fact that their own carriage horses were ill, and they had been compelled to hire. Conversation on

the topic that filled their thoughts was not recommenced till they got home and finished dinner, when Edward remarked—

“I am going to London to-morrow and shall want money.”

Gabriel went to his bureau upstairs, and when he returned handed a bundle of notes to his son in silence. Edward as silently put them in his pocket. As they separated for the night Gabriel remarked—

“ You needn’t write too often.”

“ I won’t. Letters are dangerous, and tell tales.”

Gabriel looked at his candlestick, and went upstairs, silently and slowly, to his room.

Next morning he came down late, and was relieved to find that Edward had departed on his journey. Finding it dull, and time hanging heavily on his hands, Gabriel unlocked a bookcase and took down an illustrated volume, with descriptive letterpress, of English parks, halls, and seats, and became absorbed in the description of Chiveydale Hall and Park.

De Quincey is not the only one who has taken opium to still uneasy feelings ; and for all there are various anodynes and opiates that still the quivering nerves for a time, as well as wholesome medicines ; and whether moral or physical, the one relaxes to destroy, the other pains to alleviate and cure.

END OF VOL. II.

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